



China Perspectives

A NEW EXPLORATION OF HEGEL'S DIALECTICS II

NEGATION AND REFLECTION

Deng Xiaomang



A New Exploration of Hegel's Dialectics II

Focusing on the self-negation and reflective forms of Hegel's dialectics, and representing the spirit of *nous* and *logos* respectively, this volume explores core functions in the subjectivity, free spirit and practicality of Hegelian dialectics. As the second volume of a three-volume set that gives insights into Hegel's dialectics and thereby his overall philosophical thought, the book proposes and discusses the soul and form of Hegelian dialectics. As the soul of Hegel's dialectics, which represents the spirit of *nous*, self-negation plays a fundamental role in Hegel's philosophy, and all other dialectical laws derive from this core principle, with which the subjectivity and free spirit of Hegel's dialectics take shape along with their essential practicality. The form of expression belonging to this negative dialectic as such is the reflective mode of thinking that represents the spirit of *logos*, and it is this reflective mode of thinking that follows the logical procedure of "reflecting on reflection," rendering the progression of Hegel's dialectical subject lawful, rational and logical. The title will appeal to scholars and students interested in Hegel's and Marx's philosophy, German classical philosophy and Western philosophy.

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Contents

PART I

The soul of the Hegelian dialectic: negation 1

1 The negative and the positive 3

2 Negation and subjectivity 34

3 The status of negation in Hegel's dialectic 69

PART II

The form of the Hegelian dialectic: reflection 107

4 The conceptual intension of reflection 109

5 Reflection and reason 139

6 The logical function of reflection 173

References 208

Index 213



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Part I

The soul of the Hegelian dialectic

Negation

Dieter Henrich points out in his article “Formen der Negation in Hegels Logik,” that negativity is the primary, and most important, analytical means of methodology in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Logic*; he argues that the abstract word “negation,” which has many determinations, is the only foundation for developing the philosophical theory and conceptual structure of what Hegel calls “the Idea.”¹ His criticism is that people conflate together various determinations of negation and thereby come up with abstract formulations and hollow ideas of negation, from which he draws the conclusion that it would be impossible to reduce all of the different ways in which Hegel employs negation down to one and only one sense.² This is looking at things too absolutely, however. Such an understanding as this will necessarily lead to viewing this basic concept of Hegel’s, and consequently his entire system, as a jumbled mess of disconnected pieces. In fact, Henrich only mentions two different senses of negation in this article: one is “the substantivized form of statement” (*substantivierte Aussageform*); the second is “otherness and the other of itself” (*Andersheit und das Andere seiner selbst*). The former allegedly comes from Wolffian textbooks on formal logic, but is mixed into the ontological (substantivization) tendency in the metaphysics of Baruch de Spinoza, Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte; the latter is a logical modification of actual material relations. That is, one thing excluding another thing is understood as negation, and furthermore as the negation of negation, as one thing’s “reference to itself.” In Henrich’s view, Hegel is breeding confusion between negation as a logical statement and negation as a relation of rejection or exclusion among objective things. On one hand, he “substantivizes” the logical form, making it ontological; on the other hand, he understands the (external) relations between objective “determinate beings” (*Daseienden*) as “otherness with reference to the thought of the other self” (*Beziehung auf den Gedanken des Anderen selber*).³ The transition from the prior understanding to the latter amounts to his system’s “development of speculative thought.” Because of this, Hegel’s intentional confounding here and “[w]hat can be gained from the shift in meaning of natural operations and concepts, [originating] in the constructive will of a theoretician,” serve the purpose of logically conceiving a complete, all-encompassing system.⁴ We find it very hard to

2 *Soul of the Hegelian dialectic*

endorse Henrich's analysis here as a profound understanding of Hegel's *Logic*. While Hegel made repeated and even overly repetitive criticism of one-sided intellectual thought that accompanied the rise of traditional formal logic and exhaustively clarified his own logical thought of the unity of content and form, of Truth and certainty, and of being and thinking, Henrich is still stuck at the standpoint of separation and opposition between logic and ontology, looking everywhere in Hegel's *Logic* for the "necessity" of transitioning from substantivized logic to the thought of logicized substance. He accuses the arguments Hegel makes for this as weak and impotent, believing this is a problem without a solution.⁵ This only shows that he himself does not truly understand the essence of Hegel's *Logic*. We will specifically discuss the problem of Hegel's union of logic and ontology in Volume 3. What we want to first point out in Hegel here is, negation is not simply the logical statement of a subjective thought ("negative judgment"); at the same time, it is also and essentially the ground of movement intrinsic to the objective thing (objective spirit), or "the soul of self-movement," and the subjective statement is nothing more than the articulation of this negativity intrinsic to the objective power to act. What has "shifted" is only the form and not what Henrich calls "the meaning of natural operations and concepts." That which runs through all without changing intrinsically, that unchanging becoming and undying death is, as Karl Marx put it, the dialectic as the moving and creative principle of negativity, which is the entire soul of Hegel's dialectic.

However, to gain a concrete understanding of Hegel's concept of negation, it is in fact necessary to trenchantly analyze and investigate all of its different forms of expression. On this point, Henrich is correct. His analysis in the previous paragraph may still have value if it is understood differently than as absolute opposition. The analysis that we undertake in the following is not for the sake of dissolving a single, completely integrated "soul" into mutually disconnected fragments, but is instead for the sake of examining the essential relations of this moving principle, its organic structure, the ways in which it acts and all of its different transfigurations.

Notes

1 Henrich 1989, 213.

2 Ibid., 214.

3 Ibid., 220.

4 Ibid., 227.

5 Ibid., 219.

1 The negative and the positive

What we call “the negative” is always said with reference to the opposite, “the positive.” We have no choice but to accept this premise when discussing the concept of negation even in the absence of dialectical proof. In actuality, all explorations of the negative must first of all be explorations of the relationship between the negative and the positive. However, determining the relationship between the two is one thing with respect to abstract logical form and another thing with respect to the logical relation between concrete things in-themselves, which are determinate concrete contents. In this way, the relationship of the negative and the positive is intimately tied to the problem of being and nothing as regards the substance of the world. We may penetrate the cultural background behind Hegel’s concept of negation from the bigger problem of common identity among the different peoples of this world, which may enable us to gain a richer and more concrete grasp of the concept of negation.

The cultural background of Hegel’s concept of “negation”

Hegel often presents the concept of “the negative” together with that of “nothing.” In Hegel, “nothing” is actually the most basic type of negative. Generally speaking, what comes to the Westerner’s mind when discussing “negation” or “nothing” is often an action taken in relation to something given beforehand; when it manifests in language, it is saying “nothing” in relation to something or to somebody else. As Hegel puts it: “the abstract, immediate negation, the nothing purely for itself, negation devoid of reference—and this can also be expressed, if one so wishes, simply by saying ‘nothing.’”¹ Because of this, the Westerner’s concept of “nothing” encompasses two levels: (1) “nothing” is a “lack” of being (something given beforehand). That is, darkness is only the absence of light, and cold is only the lack of warmth; without “being,” there is no “nothing” of which to speak, insofar as being is prior to nothing. Parmenides only argues that non-being (nothing) is not, because “lack” as such has no being of its own. This even becomes one of the most important theoretical grounds upon which Aristotle opposes Plato’s theory of Ideas: how could it be that something that has ceased-to-be and no longer exists still has its own Idea?² Since nothing presupposes being, in

4 *Soul of the Hegelian dialectic*

logic, negation presupposes affirmation. (2) “Nothing” is not simply the lack of “being.” Nothing is also a negative attitude or action in relation to being, for which reason, nothing and negation are always connected together with movement and activity. In the Westerner’s view, pure being, simple positivity is static and unchanging, so it cannot produce movement. For this reason, Parmenides negates nothing, but not without negating movement as a necessary consequence, and Heraclitus’s “becoming” had to assume the identity of being and nothing. Democritus’s “void” (nothing) is a condition of movement, but since it only encompasses the first meaning of “nothing” (lack) without the second meaning of the active movement of negation, it fails to explain the problem of the “source” of movement and falls prey to Aristotle’s criticism. Aristotle determines movement as “the actualization of potential,” where actualization (ἐνέργεια) as an active process similarly carries the meaning of negation, that is, negating the potentialities of the “material” given beforehand, imparting it with a certain form and actualizing the purpose concealed in it. Therefore, when Hegel comments on Aristotle’s category of “actuality” (i.e., actualization): “with Aristotle this negativity, this active efficacy, is expressly characterized as energy,” “in Aristotle there is added and made conspicuous the moment of negativity, not as change, nor yet as nullity, but as difference or determination.”³ In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he also mentions, “This is why certain ancients conceived of the *void* as what moved things in conceiving of what moves things as the *negative*, but they did not yet grasp this negative as the self.”⁴ In other words, they did not grasp that the moving principle is more than “that which is” negative, insofar as it is negation as such.

Christians of the Middle Ages believed God created the entire world from “nothing,” but that which is ultimately first is not “nothing,” because God is absolute being and one in himself; in other words, God is *logos*, *dao*: “At the very beginning there was *dao*”; *dao* creates the world in “producing being from nothing,” but *dao* itself is the highest principle that creates the world in the manner of “producing being from nothing,” which exhibits the negative will of God. That is, God negates his own abstractness, transcending his own “silence” and “loneliness.” The modern mystical thinker Jacob Böhme held that activity and the vital impulse is a “torment” (*Qual*), the thought of which Hegel found to be of utmost importance, insisting “By anguish is expressed that which we know as the absolute negativity—that is the self-conscious, self-experienced, the self-relating negativity which is therefore absolute affirmation.”⁵

Among the qualities inherent in *matter*, *motion* is the first and foremost, not only in the form of *mechanical* and *mathematical* motion, but chiefly in the form of an *impulse*, a *vital spirit*, a *tension*—or a “Qual,” to use a term of Jakob Böhme’s — of matter.⁶

No more examples are needed, for it is already clear that the Western tradition of thought most certainly contains a factor that actively breaks boundaries, fuses substances, shapes things, realizes purposes and makes rigid categorial

determinations “flow” by negating and “voiding.” This active factor is no alien force imposing itself from the outside, but rather wells up from inside of things themselves, a *qual*, a vitality. In the previous chapter we have already named this factor in the Western philosophical tradition “the existential impulse.” Here we want to emphasize that in contrast to Westerners, who understand “nothing” as an active negation of something given beforehand (being), “nothing” in Chinese antiquity, *wu* 无, was never understood as an action (the action of “voiding” or negating), but was always understood as a primordial state, a state of empty stillness without active impulse. The first philosopher to present this thought in Chinese history was Laozi, who insisted: “All beings in Nature come to life from being, while being comes to life from nothing.”⁷ “Nothing” as quiescent beholding without restless desire is the most subtle and vital *dao*. “Thus constantly (*chang* 常) desire nothing to perceive its subtleties and constantly desire something to perceive its boundaries.”⁸ The Silk Manuscript Version goes: “eternally (*heng* 恒) desire nothing in order to perceive its subtleties; eternally desire something in order to perceive its boundaries.” Therefore, there is no need to take any action; one only needs to “reach the extreme pole of emptiness, maintain the critical point of stillness; the multitude of creatures co-operate, I thereby observe them return to it.”⁹ Wang Bi’s commentary states:

Language reaches the extreme truthfulness of an empty being and sustains the genuine straightforwardness of a quiet being; all creatures move and act, produce and grow by emptying and quieting; observing them repeat and return, whatever there is, it arises from empty capacity, and movement springs from rest; thus, all beings move and produce each other, but end up restoring the empty and returning to quiet, which is the extreme sincerity of the being.¹⁰

Clearly, nothing is in-itself empty and still. All movement and change is the film bubbling up on this deeply calm surface of “nothing,” and that film is “being”; when the bubbling film dissolves, all returns again to stillness. Zhuangzi became the inheritor of Laozi’s doctrine, advocating “all beings emerge from nothing; being cannot make being by being, and must generate it from nothing.”¹¹ This is self-evidently clear. Interestingly, the pro-being theorist Pei Wei (裴頠) refutes the “pro-nothing theory” by arguing that “nothing” cannot explain the “genesis” (movement) of things:

In the theory of absolute nothing, nothing cannot generate life, so that which begets life, spontaneously gives birth to life of itself. Spontaneously coming to life of itself, it must embody being; then, when being is lost, life dissolves; life appropriates being as the content of itself, hence nothing is what is lost of being.¹²

Nothing is the loss of being (what is lost of being), which Laozi himself acknowledges. For instance, Laozi states: “if a great production is lacking, its

usefulness is not degraded”;¹³ “Thirteen spokes converge on one hub, which by filling their void (nothing), utilizes the being of the cart.”¹⁴ What differs is, Laozi still considers the empty nothing as the condition of motion (using, utilizing), similar to Democritus of ancient Greece, whereas Pei Wei insists only “being” is needed for movement without any need of nothing: “Being is all that aids being, how would nothing benefit the teams of life already possessing being?”¹⁵ Even though these two factions split into opposing viewpoints on the question of what the origin is, they are unanimous on this one point that movement, generation and destruction all fall under being, while resting, emptying and voiding belong to nothing; they could reach the first viewpoint in ancient Greece according to which nothing is the “absence” of being, but they could not reach the second viewpoint according to which nothing is movement and activity of negation. Later thinkers such as Cheng Mingdao held that “being and nothing are identical to movement and rest.”¹⁶ Wang Fuzhi then denied there is nothing in reality so as to deny rest: “functioning in Nature is all being”;¹⁷ matter is not destroyed, “being” is not destroyed either, and everything is the coming to be and passing away, contracting and expanding, condensing and rarifying, darkening and brightening of being, while what is called “nothing” is nothing more than human laziness, merely the failure to understand the principle of movement in all things and that is all: “when seeking the truth but not getting it, or when not even seeking the truth out of laziness, people call it nothing and call it a day.”¹⁸

This, however, generated an irresolvable problem for ancient Chinese philosophy, which was: this dynamic understanding of “being” could never find any way of rising to “pure being” of the highest abstraction, because “being” contains the meaning of “becoming” within it; it was only “actual being” and “determinate being.” Similarly, those who stood opposed to “nothing” could never understand abstract “pure nothing,” that is, nothing as “negation,” precisely because they simply opposed a static unchanging nothing with the restless production and reproduction of all beings. For the most typical case, look no further than Zhang Zai, who argued: “knowing that absolute space (*taixu* 太虚) is still intensive force (*qi* 气) is to void the nothing.”¹⁹ Here, in “to void the nothing” (*wuwu* 无无), the first *wu* 无 (to void) already means “to negate.” That is, Zhang Zai actually already uses this sense of nothing (and hence accepts it), but because what it negates is not nothing in the sense of the negative, but is rather nothing as the original substance of every being’s empty resting capacity (that is, the second “nothing”), he erroneously felt himself to have already negated all “nothing.” In other words, he ultimately does not know how to reflect on that nothing which he himself uses to negate nothing. He does not know that he already affirms nothing as said negation precisely when he is voiding (i.e., negating) nothing. The blame here can only lie in his failure to ever imagine that nothing might not be a state of “something” but could be an action as well. He even fails to understand nothing in this sense of active negation when he carries out this action (negation) in the name of *wu* 无 (voiding). Cheng Mingdao similarly confuses these two

senses of *wu* 无, equivocally identifying abstract nothing with the concrete, voided “something” while simultaneously equivocating abstract pure being with concrete “determinate being.” He argues: “when ‘nothing’ is said to be (*you* 有), the wording ‘to be’ is redundant; when ‘nothing’ is said not to be (*wu* 无), the wording ‘not to be’ is redundant.”²⁰ That is to say, he wants to cancel out “the wording ‘to be’” as abstract positivity and “the wording ‘not to be’” as abstract negativity for the reason of redundancy, and what remains are only being and nothing as concrete movement and rest, becoming and not changing. In contrast, Zhuangzi’s distinctions seem a bit more refined. He argues: “there is the argument ‘being is,’ there is the argument ‘nothing is,’ there is the argument ‘nothing never begins to be,’ there is the argument ‘being never begins and in this way nothing never begins to be.’”²¹ “Nothing as such is nothing.”²² This is no play on words but a quest, a struggle, an effort to rise from the concrete concepts of being and nothing to abstract concepts of being and nothing. Yet, ultimately, it falls into the regress of the “bad infinite” due to insufficient abstraction; it falls into some version of skepticism: “suddenly there is ‘nothing,’ but it remains unknown in either the case of ‘being’ or the case of ‘nothing,’ which ‘is’ and which ‘is not.’”²³ However, this speculative moment in Zhuangzi, especially his thought that “nothing as such is nothing,” ultimately reached the deepest level of understanding in ancient China’s categories of being and nothing, because “nothing as such is nothing” is not the same as Zhang Zai “voiding nothing,” insofar as Zhuangzi says the former in the affirmative sense; it is not used to negate “nothing.” Through infinite regress, he already saw abstract “nothing” (the negative) as a higher category above concrete being and non-being. It is only that, since he could not just stop at this category, but instead had to rush ahead in the regress toward indifference, he ultimately failed to adequately reflect just like Zhang Zai himself and he let this category go as soon as it was already in hand. The one who reached the same level of abstract speculation as Zhuangzi (and perhaps achieved more refinement than he) was Sengzhao of Jin, but like Zhuangzi, Sengzhao could not free himself of the concrete viewpoint of becoming and change to consider the pure relationship of being and nothing. He developed and deepened the dialectic of being and nothing, but ultimately fell into the subjective idealism of “being and nothing are shadow and echo of the affective mind.”²⁴

Clearly, in ancient Chinese philosophy, “nothing” had always been seen as a more abstract category than “being.” There were a few (Laozi, Zhuangzi, *xuanxue* etc.) who saw it as the highest underlying substance of the world precisely for it having the highest abstraction, but it was precisely this abstractness that led others (the pro-being theorists, Song and Ming dynasty neo-Confucian rationalists, Wang Fuzhi etc.) to either interpret it as a state and a quality of “being” or to simply reject it and deny that it has any independent sense whatsoever. Of course, even those who were denying “nothing” did not by any means oppose the practice of retaining this word in language. *The Classic of Mozi* states: “nothing need not depend on being,

it depends on what is meant,” which permits the independent usage of it but does not allow it to have independent factual signification, because language and names must have substance and must correspond to substances. So “saying tortoises are not hairy is speaking of dogs, not of tortoises.”²⁵ To say tortoises are not hairy could only mean that tortoises do not have the hair that dogs have; “the followers of Laozi and Zhuangzi are beyond base in decisively saying the invisible and inaudible are nothings.”²⁶ Nothing as such is only the idea fabricated by the imagination for “that which is invisible and inaudible” and meaningful sense is only attributable to “the non-being of a something.” In Hegel’s words, this is merely accepting “a determinate, contentful nothing,” but he immediately points out, “A determinateness, however, as will be found later on, is itself a negation; thus they are negative nothings; a negative nothing is however something affirmative.”²⁷ A determinate nothing (concrete nothing) actually already contains abstract nothing as pure negativity: saying tortoises are not hairy is straightforwardly negating that tortoises are hairy; such a negation does not need to depend on affirming that other animals like dogs, horses and cows “are hairy,” which is an independent and self-affirming action that is meaningful in-itself. If it were to subsist on another idea, that could only be more abstract being or “pure being,” not concrete being (“being hairy”). This level of thinking was unreachable for Wang Fuzhi and his simple dialectic. Wang Fuzhi only understands determined being and specified non-being, and among them, being claims greater concretion and reality than non-being, for which reason being was the ground and foundation of non-being. For Wang Fuzhi, non-being is posited by being and cannot independently sustain itself. Being and nothing in this understanding, for Hegel, “no longer has mere being and nothing for the sides which it binds, but has being expressly as ground, and something which, although only posited and not standing on its own, is however not abstract nothing.”²⁸ Up until now, there are still many among us whose understanding of Hegel’s “negative” (and nothing) remains stuck at the level of Wang Fuzhi’s, that is, understanding from specific contents and determinations of concrete quality. For instance, some have derived two levels of meaning via induction from Hegel’s “negative”:

One, determining a quality of something is to deny (negate) something’s possession of the quality, which is the opposite of said quality, like affirming brightness is negating darkness. Moreover, by having determined a quality, there comes with it a boundary, and for said quality to step over this boundary is to negate itself. Two, not only is this so, but also, a simple and isolated “positive quality” divorced from “a negative quality” is no determination at all and there is no affirmation divorced from negation, which is to say a “determinate quality” is only said to be and to be determined when it is united in opposition with its “inverse quality,” and the concrete instantiation of the second point is again “brightness with darkness.”²⁹

For a similar viewpoint, see (Shuren 1985, 53): “any affirmation simultaneously implies the existence of negative significations. For instance, only selecting one color simultaneously implies the rejection of other colors.” There are also some outside China who hold this view, such as Norman Levine, but he simultaneously points out that negation is not just the exclusion of another but is also the transcending of it in-itself.³⁰ Actually, Hegel did indeed present this viewpoint, but this was not his primary standpoint on affirmation and negation. The instances of light and darkness are by no means presented as the most abstract and general instances of affirmation and negation, being and nothing, but rather as concrete instances of determinate existence (*Existenz*).³¹ Light and darkness are concrete examples that “can be observed empirically in this field of empirical subject matters.”³² Hegel’s real intention is to lead those who would only engage in empirical thought with these examples to peel off these concrete cases and discover within them this principle of immediate identity between being and nothing, affirmation and negation, because only immediate identity is true (dialectical) contradiction. This principle does not just state something being or affirmative of one thing and one “aspect” and then something not-being or negative of another thing and another aspect, but also states that affirmation is in-itself negation for one and the same thing or aspect. Hegel cites Plato here:

The point of difficulty, and what we ought to aim at, is to show that what is the other is the same, and what is the same is another, and likewise in the same regard and from the same point of view to show that the one has in them come into existence if the other determination is revealed within them.³³

Conversely, playing with a contradiction from different points of view is sophistry. Hegel calls that point of view which assumes light is only something positive and darkness only something negative (and thus assumes the opposition of positive and negative is only the external opposition of light and darkness) “the fixed opposition of these determinations of reflection,” and points out, “[b]ut light has, in its unending expansion and power to suscite and vivify, the nature of absolute negativity,” and “light, in referring to [darkness], would not be referring to another but purely to itself, would therefore simply disappear before it.”³⁴ According to this understanding, if we have to use “light” as an example, we ought to then say: positive light itself is in the first place the negative of the negation of light (that is, light is opposing not-light)). When Spinoza first asserted that “*omnis determinatio est negatio*,” what he meant, as he himself said, was that all determination “only means the lack of that determinate quality exists.”³⁵ It does not, as people generally understand it, mean that it lacks another quality. With respect to light and darkness, Spinoza also insisted that “[s]urely just as light reveals both itself and darkness, so truth is the norm both of itself and of what is false.”³⁶ In other words, light firstly displays itself, secondly displays darkness, and thirdly (or precisely because of

this) negates darkness (that is, light is not darkness). The former proposition (light is not not-light) possesses the logical “universality of the determinations involved,” and may enjoy “infinite extension and universal applicability.”³⁷ In this case we could replace “light” with x and it becomes a logical principle: $x = -(-x)$. That is, the negative of the negative is positive. Inversely, the latter proposition (light is not darkness) can only stand up on condition of first getting to know from experience the oppositional relationship of light and darkness; hence, it is not a logical principle (we cannot generally say $x = -y$), for it is only an empirical fact. From the perspective of logic, a concrete oppositional relationship is based on negation, but negation is not however premised by a concrete oppositional relationship: rather we should say, only negation is responsible for causing the first most abstract and general relationship of opposition, that is, the opposition of negation and affirmation. Many of us today are still frequently incapable of doing genuine speculative thought or even logical thinking, insofar as coming down from speculation to the level of empirical thought is always forced upon us, which we must face is related to the lack of logical training in our traditional Chinese thinking.

Leaving aside the empirical understanding of being and nothing (the being or non-being of finite things) in ancient Chinese traditional philosophy, only Lao-Zhuang Daoism, *xuanxue* (obscurism) and Buddhist philosophy (like Prajna Buddhism, especially “the underlying nothingness sect”) had reached the speculative level of thought, the hallmark of which was the purest and most abstract “nothing” (or “emptiness”) being considered as the underlying substance of the world, bypassing for the moment the finer distinction between “nothingness” and “emptiness.” This nothing is not (or is not in the first place) “the lack of being,” but is rather the origin and ground of all beings, but precisely because of this it is not the negation of immediate, preexisting being either, because it is more immediate than being and it is prior to or concealed within all readily available beings as the quiescent ground to which all beings return and even the oneness of all things. Comparing this abstract speculative philosophy with Western speculative philosophy from Parmenides to Hegel, a most fundamental distinction becomes visible: Western philosophy is overall the philosophy of “being,” and regardless of how Western philosophers determine the relationship of being and nothing, their first basic category is always being. For instance, when Heraclitus speaks of concrete things, he says all things “both are and are not,” but when speaking of *logos*, he says it “is eternal.” This is the reason why Hegel has no choice but to borrow examples from Buddhism and Chinese philosophy when accounting for the philosophy of “nothing,” and why his *Science of Logic* cannot begin from nothing but must begin with “being” (even though he believes these two categories are only immediately identical and indistinguishable at the very beginning). Jean-Paul Sartre noticed that in Hegel:

Non-being is not the opposite of being; it is its contradiction. This implies that logically nothingness is subsequent to being since it is being, first

posited, then denied. It can not be therefore that being and non-being are concepts with the same content since on the contrary non-being supposes an irreducible mental act. Whatever may be the original undifferentiation of being, non-being is that same undifferentiation *denied*. This permits Hegel to make being pass into nothingness; this is what by implication has introduced negation into his very definition of being.³⁸

Let us look at his grounds for refuting the argument that we should begin with nothing: "That 'nothing' is the result of the argument, and that the beginning would then have to be made with nothing (as in Chinese philosophy) need not cause us to lift a finger. For even before we had lifted it, this nothing would have turned into being just as much."³⁹

Indeed, if the beginning were made with nothing, it would result in the philosophy of passive non-action with no need to "lift a finger." But Hegel still explains the need to begin with being for the reason that "nothing turned into being," which is not quite convincing, because, in the case of beginning with nothing (as Chinese philosophy does), the proposition "nothing as such is being" (or being is a nothing) is only a derivative, second-order proposition, which does not rely on the active process of "lifting a finger" or negating, but which relies on the natural downfall of this highest abstract level of "nothing" to come into being. This is also to say, we can only take the next step of reducing "everything" to "nothing" after we imagine nothing as the highest abstract substance, which alone turns nothing itself into being. For this reason, Laozi only says "being names the mother of everything" after he makes the statement "nothing names the embryonic beginning of the world." But the philosophies that posit nothing as the origin (such as those of Laozi and Zhuangzi) make perfectly clear that this "being" cannot be posited together with the highest "nothing," because it does not have the abstractness and primordality that belong to nothing; in order to avoid turning nothing into "being," they invented this clever method of infinite regress whereby "even nothing is not." Hegel never considers in detail this cultural peculiarity of being and nothing in Chinese philosophy, but rather immediately folds them into his own system according to the Western habit of thinking and hence cannot avoid getting it wrong.

We can derive the following conclusion from this: whether to make being the beginning or to make nothing the beginning is not simply a problem of Hegel's random preference, but is a problem determined by the entire tradition of a cultural psyche. Because a nothing starting from being is necessarily active negation, that is, because it is necessarily the self-estrangement and self-alienation of a something, this can only produce an outwardly aggressive impulse of freedom and a philosophy of breaking self-limitations, which alone reflects on and returns to itself. The inverse, being which starts from nothing, then, is only natural becoming ("unreflective being in-itself"); it is only maintaining effortless tranquility of inner mind in the face of all external influences; it is but the indistinction and indifference of all beings and the dissolution of

individuals. The former reflects the torment and guilt of the person's inner mind and the endless Faustian pursuit of fresh stimulus; the latter reflects the ease and self-satisfaction of the person needing nothing at all, like Yan Hui's humble dwelling amid the basest alleys and the Daoist hermit receding into the forested mountains. In terms of understanding "nothing," then, the necessity is: the former understands nothing as the inner impulse of moving development; the latter understands nothing as the tranquil state of silent inaction; the former understands nothing as separation and contradiction; the latter understands nothing as harmony without contention; the former understands nothing as free will; the latter understands nothing as natural contentment or contorted will ("following the heart's content without stepping over the line"). Clearly, in these two most abstract categories, being and nothing (affirmation and negation), what at first glance seems like an unassuming reversal of order ultimately implies such a wealth of cultural differences!

The negation of the negation

Henrich insists in the article mentioned previously that Hegel takes his principle of the double negative (or "double negation") from traditional logic and grammatical rules but applies it to ontology. In Henrich's view, this is assuredly confounding, because if affirmation, the result of the double negation, can play a role as a point of view in the field of ontology, as when Hegel tries to explain the source of all activity and self-movement with it, then its premise is: the positive as such that produces the double negative is already posited beforehand as an ontological principle.⁴⁰ Is the negation of the negation a logical principle or an ontological principle? This is a poor way of posing the question. Even in the modern age, there are still those who intuitively understand this term "ontological" in terms of a mechanical picture of mutual separation and mutual exclusion between "a being" and "another being."⁴¹ This seems nearly inconceivable. Leaving aside modern physics, which broke through this sort of intuitive representational understanding of the world already well before Hegel's time, even for Hegel, this understanding stops short at the meager level of "the perceptual understanding."⁴² In Hegel's view, even extrinsic relations of mutual negation between things (in repelling and excluding) still in essence embody a deeper law, that is, the self-negativity inside things, and this essential law is firstly expressed in its pure form by logic.

At first look, things indeed seem this way: we could say one thing "negated" another thing, we could say something "does not exist" or "is not there," we could even say of something that it "is not," but in actuality there is no "negation" between one thing and another thing; there is only "exclusion." From the perspective of the thing itself, we also have no right to say something "does not exist," because what does not exist is unspeakable, since it exists as soon as we speak of it (or at the very least it exists in the meaning and sense of that which is said of it). Moreover, that subject matter itself,

of which we say it “is not,” is never “not,” and so on. However, in Hegel’s view, these are nothing more than some opinions of lower forms of cognition such as sensing, perceiving and understanding. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he makes things or objects, which are objectively external to one another, transition from an obstinate relationship of opposition into a fluid “process of negation” by way of reducing “things” to “forces” (and their expression) and by analyzing the essence of “force.” This could very well make the universal relations that we express in language and logic penetrate the essence of “things,” or rather, it could make these relations express the pure form of essential relations in things themselves. This “reversed” understanding of the world is demonstrated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* through Newtonian mechanics as Hegel explained it, but it actually fits much better with understandings in modern physics like Werner Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle.” Regardless of how, after the fixed and unchanging difference between “something” and “another” is sublated, the negation of the negation no longer remains a purely grammatical rule but becomes the law of motion in the objective world.

Considered from the ontological perspective (and not from what Henrich calls the “substantivized form of statement”), this concept of negation is no longer simply an external negativity in Hegel; it is not simply an “excluding” or “repelling” (neither a subjective repelling of the objective nor a mutual exclusion between many objects), but is rather one identical thing’s negation of itself (ultimately speaking, it is the self-negativity of one thing alone). In other words, it is not one thing “suffering” a negation coming from outside of itself, but is rather this thing itself negating itself, its own transcendence of itself, its own self-affirmation or self-determination of breaking down itself. The premise of this understanding is: the underlying substance is “one” and not an indifferent “multiple,” and negation is the principle of consistent linking by one thread in this underlying substance. Thus, negation is the underlying substance becoming “one,” that is, the ground substance qua substance (because a substance that cannot become “one” is not truly substance, but the phenomenal appearance of one pile). Therefore, negation is negation of itself. As “nothing,” the negative is not the “lack” of some preexisting thing (determinate being), nor is it a “determinate and contentful nothing” obtained by negating some other determination. Such a specifically determined and contentful nothing is only the result of later developments. Nothing ought to be first understood in its simplicity: “the nothing which is being opposed to something is also the nothing of a certain something, a determinate nothing. Here, however, the nothing is to be taken in its indeterminate simplicity.”⁴³ That is to say, the negative as pure nothing is not some specific determinacy, but is rather the negative that every determinacy is by itself. Determination as such is negation. Hegel cites this principle of Spinoza’s not in order to say: having determined something, it is then necessary to negate other things; but instead, determination is the negation of that very first indeterminacy (or Aristotle’s “potentiality”). This also means: every

determination or affirmation is in the first place already a process of negating the negative. So, “[s]omething is the first negation of negation, as simple existent self-reference.”⁴⁴

It is clear from this that what Hegel calls negation is negation of itself, but self-negation is itself the negation of negation, which, in terms of articulation appears like two things. That is, the negation of negation is “double negation” or “the self-reference” of negation as the object of itself, but ontologically speaking, it is one identical something, because negation as such can only be understood as “self-reference,” and any “self-reference” can only be negation’s reference to itself as the negation of itself (simple self-affirmation is still not yet self-reference but is instead the absence of references); and if “referring to another” does not switch over into referring to itself, it cannot be seen as negation and is merely external, metaphysical exclusion and repulsion. It is not the philosopher (Hegel) who externally turns the spearhead of negation toward negation itself and only consequently derives the principle of “the negation of negation.” On the contrary, it is this nature of self-negativity inside of negation that makes itself the negation of negation.

[T]he movement of “what is” consists in becoming an other to itself and thus in coming to be its own immanent content; on the other hand, it takes this unfolding back into itself, or it takes its existence back into itself, which is to say, it makes itself into a moment, and it simplifies itself into determinateness. In that movement, negativity is differentiating and positing of existence; in this latter return into itself, negativity consists in the coming-to-be of determinate simplicity.⁴⁵

The negation of negation, this movement of returning into itself, is nothing other than negativity itself acquiring determination and becoming determinate. In other words, if negation is carried out to the end, for negation to become a determinate universal principle, it must necessarily contain a reflexive reference to itself. For negation as such to be considered as a principle, it is necessary for it to be the negation of negation—the simple principle of positive self-possession of its own being. Inversely, if negation does not apply to itself, it cannot become a principle of universal consistency; it still has some point in-itself to which the principle does not apply (for instance, a skepticism that doubts everything but never doubts itself). In this way, the negative lingers externally alongside the positive in a fixed reference to it; unable to truly negate the opposite side, the negative instead simply excludes it.

However, even though negation, self-negation and the negation of negation are all in essence the same thing, they still must be differentiated in articulation so as to unfold the full intension of this negative essence.

As something, the negative of the negative is only the beginning of the subject—its in-itselfness is still quite indeterminate. It determines itself further on, at first as existent-for-itself and so on, until it finally obtains

in the concept the intensity of the subject. At the base of all these determinations there lies the negative unity with itself. In all this, however, care must be taken to distinguish the first negation, negation as negation in general, from the second negation, the negation of negation which is concrete, absolute negativity, just as the first is on the contrary only abstract negativity.⁴⁶

Carefully distinguishing abstract negation from absolute negation and investigating the passage from one to the other is the work that Hegel calls “essential reflection” (“[f]irst, essence shines within itself”).⁴⁷ We will specifically investigate Hegel’s “reflection” in the next chapter, where we will see that this concept is nearly as important in Hegel’s methodological system as “negation” is. At this juncture, however, we merely restrict ourselves to pointing out that the three forms of reflection which Hegel presents at the very beginning of the “Doctrine of Essence” are effectively articulations of negation (or self-negation) on three different levels. Generally speaking, when we speak of “self-negation,” a problem might immediately arise: what is it that negates itself? There could be two answers: one is that the positive negates itself, namely that which is immediately positive contains in itself the negation of itself, so this negation is the positive by itself negating itself and the negative is posited as an element that is different from the positive which contains it; the other answer is, this negation by itself negates itself; namely, this negation that negates the positive likewise contains the negation of itself as well, which elevates it from simple negation to the negation of negation. However, in essence, these two different kinds of self-negation actually mean one thing because in the former self-negation, that is, in the self-negation of the positive by itself, the immediately positive as such is a negative movement from the very beginning:

This self-equality or immediacy, therefore, is not a first from which the beginning is made and which would pass over into its negation; nor is there an existent substrate which would go through the moves of reflection; immediacy is rather just this movement itself.⁴⁸

Thus, the self-negation of the positive by itself is actually the negation of this negative movement of immediacy, that is, the negation of negation. As to the second case of self-negation, that is, the self-negation of the negative by itself, since the negative itself, when negating itself in this case, is treated as another kind of positive something (different from the first kind, i.e., when the positive negates itself), so it is also the self-negating of something positive. Thus, as we synthesize these two differentiated and yet identical self-negations, we get a concrete self-negating concept, that is, the concept of negation of and by itself, which is the unity of self-reflection and reflection in another.

These three concepts of self-negation are respectively given careful analysis in Hegel’s three forms of reflection. “Positing Reflection” analyzes the first self-negation, that is, the movement of the positive negating itself. This

is skepticism's form of reflection. Skepticism negates all that is immediately given, viewing all of it as "shine" (*Schein*), as unreal things that are negative for itself and negated by itself, and the only thing that skepticism does not negate and does not doubt is this doubt itself and negation itself. When skepticism "posits" this negation itself, this results in subjective idealism: "man is the measure of all things," "or "I think (doubt) therefore I am." In this way, negation (doubt) by itself becomes an immediately affirmed principle, which, after canceling out the first positive immediacy that had been negated, posits negation itself as the immediately positive; it thereby reverses the original "affirmation—negation" into "negation—affirmation," which turns negation into the "negativity which abides with itself, self-referring negativity."⁴⁹ This affirmed negation that abides with itself, as luck would have it, is no longer negated; it is the opposite of negation, which is the negation of negation, but as such, it still has not become conscious of this point, still erroneously assuming that what the two negations are positing or affirming is only a simple negation. When this self-negation recognizes this point, this initiates the second stage of reflection, that of "external reflection." What is considered at this stage is the second type of self-negation, that is, negation once again negating itself by being taken as something affirmative, which is the understanding's style of negation; it already recognizes itself as a self-referring negation that abides with itself (like Kant's transcendental ego) and the very object of its negation is a self-negating thing as well (semblance or phenomenon, empirical sense data), so by itself it is a negative of a negative, but this negation of the negation here still goes about externally, as if what it is negating is not negation itself but rather something positive, some external and alien other, which is immediately given for the act of negation; it seems as if this other does not arise from negation itself, but rather has another source (the thing in-itself). These two negations are not posited in one identical process of negation, but are both respectively "posited beforehand" (by the thing in-itself) and hence are supposed by way of external reflection. Finally, the third kind of reflection, namely "determining reflection" does away with the external form of reflection; it is the understandingly posited self-relating negation (self-negation), the true negation of negation, which no longer sees the object of negation as a fixed pre-given fact or as a positive thing passively waiting for negation to externally act upon it, but rather sees the object of negation as a process of self-positing, the process of negation; the object of negation and what is negating it are the same process (just like the identity of consciousness and self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Therefore: "It is positedness—negation which has however deflected the reference to another into itself, and negation which, equal to itself, is the unity of itself and its other, and only through this is an essentiality."⁵⁰

Only determining reflection can grasp essence and appearance in a unity, can grasp "the actual" essence and pass over into "the concept," because it grasps the positive (existence) in the negative (essence). It posits the affirmative, not by relying on immediate certainty (posited beforehand), but by the

negation of the negative through which it returns to the affirmative and enters the unbroken movement of negating, positing and “determining.” Here, the process of returning to the affirmative from the affirmative through the negation of itself by itself “is the movement from nothing to nothing and thereby back to itself.”⁵¹ That is to say, looking on from the standpoint of “being,” it seems to be the very first, immediate, presuppositionless, positive crux of the matter, but from the standpoint of “essence,” it is a single, and moreover, identical movement of the negation of negation, which only becomes the immediate as a result of this movement “turning back to itself.” The immediacy of being is positive and the immediacy of essence is negative; negation is only the mediating of immediacy in being, but negation is essentially the immediate essence itself. Because of this, “determining reflection” illustrates that there is no longer the need to distinguish whether self-negation is the negation of the positive or the negation of negative itself, but only insofar as determining reflection completely transcends the narrow standpoint of being (from which the former two kinds of reflection could not break free) and ascends to the viewpoint of essentiality, at which point using a single, simple and absolute “principle of negation” suffices to encapsulate the two and simultaneously to go beyond them.

In precisely the same way that Hegel’s principle of negation (or self-negation) acquires the most precise determination in his doctrine of reflection, people will easily get lost in those extremely abstract and obscure expositions of Hegel’s if they do not consider his doctrine of reflection closely in connection with the thought of “negation” and do not understand each kind of reflection as a varying form of negation. Wang Shuren states, “[t]he basic thread to unraveling the true sense of the concept of ‘reflection’” is “the essence ‘moving itself’ and plunging deeper into its own ‘infinite movement’ through dialectical negation.”⁵² However, since he does not deeply consider Hegel’s concept of negation, Wang Shuren also seems unable to truly grasp this basic thread in this work of his. As to this latter point of how to understand reflection and the types of reflection from the standpoint of negation, we will specifically investigate it in the next chapter. Here, we only mention Hegel’s doctrine of reflection beforehand for the sake of grasping the finer implications of Hegel’s concept of negation and carefully differentiating the internal implications of negation (self-negation and the negation of negation) through reflection.

The previous analysis has shown that despite the importance of Hegel’s negation and his negation of negation, unless distinctions and determinations are made so as to unfold their intensions through reflection, these principles could likewise devolve into sophistry, fall into doubt and even become one-sided abstract laws modeled off of the understanding. The reflective thought of negation illustrates that, although negation as a simple point is already the starting point of all that is truly real, “[t]he simple point of the negative self-reference, the innermost source of all activity, of living and spiritual self-movement; it is the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and

through which alone it is true"; it is not only an immediate starting point but also "constitutes the turning point of the movement of the concept."⁵³ It "is not an act of external reflection; for it is on the contrary the innermost, objective moment of the life of spirit by virtue of which a subject is a person, is free."⁵⁴ In this sense, negation is no longer simply finite negation, but has become "absolute negation," because as a "turning point," it inwardly turns reflection on itself and thereby returns to immediate positivity, which is to say, it posits itself as a principle of affirmation through the negation of negation, and this principle of affirmation is also a principle of "absolute affirmation" by virtue of being the principle of mediated immediacy. In this way, negation as an activity advances to a principled and self-determining freedom (self-articulation) from freedom in the negative sense of simple arbitrariness and liberation from restrictions, and thereby attains freedom as the highest form of negativity.⁵⁵ Negation as a "simple point" still fails to become an independent principle (even though it is already the innermost "source"), while the negation of negation succeeds in becoming an independent principle, a "subject" (and not just "subjectivity"), a "person." The negation of negation establishes negation as a principle. Sophism, skepticism and the understanding do the opposite in speaking of negation without making it a consistent principle: despite negating everything, Sophism and skepticism do not negate negation itself; they see negation as a simple nothing without being but fail to consider negation as a valid (affirmative) principle. The thought of the understanding is no different, insofar as Kant's a priori synthesis of self-consciousness is a negativity of external reflection. He insists that exercising this negativity of subjective consciousness to regulate empirical data (coming from the outside) is sufficient to build up "objectively" valid scientific knowledge, yet without noticing that he never takes one step outside of "the I." Hegel cites Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's criticism: "I am impossibility itself, the nihilating of all things manifold and plural—cannot, from my pure, absolutely simple and unchanging essence, produce again, or conjure in me as shadow, even the least bit of anything."⁵⁶

Among Fichte's three propositions, that is, among "the absolute self-positing of the Ego," "the absolute self-positing of the non-Ego" and "the absolute self-positing of Ego and non-Ego," the advance of the first proposition to the second is similarly by way of the understanding,

[t]his is an advance by external reflection that negates the absolute with which it makes its beginning (the counter-positing is the negation of the first identity) while at the same time equally reducing its second absolute, explicitly, to something conditioned.⁵⁷

These two erroneous understandings of negation cannot produce the result of affirmation from negation and cannot turn negation into a truly objective necessity (of course, Kant's antinomies already touched on this point), and thus "one stays fixed at the abstract negative aspect of dialectics."⁵⁸

The one thing needed to achieve scientific progress [...] is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is the negation of the determined fact which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives.⁵⁹

Negation results in a “new concept,” which is higher and richer than the forerunning concept. For negation to reach this result, it cannot simply wait on another external, contingently encountered determination to negate. On the contrary, every determination has the impulse to actively negate itself and contains in its self-negation the crucial substance of the negation of the negative (affirmation), but the negation of negative as affirmation, as a new result, as a reversion to the original affirmation on a higher level, only clearly displays this process by completing itself in “an unstoppable and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous.”⁶⁰ Therefore, to truly see negation as essence, one cannot simply see it as a starting point, but must also see it as a “turning point” for turning back on itself. Do not simply look at negation as the “subjectivity” possessed by some sort of substance (like Kant’s self-asserting I); look at negation itself as the subject of affirmation. This is what Hegel means by calling the first negation “formal” (or abstract) negation, and the second negation, that is, the negation of negation, “absolute” negation.

Aside from exhibiting negation itself as a resultative and renewing principle, the negation of negation also grounds a further development. That is, the negation of negation is not just the result; it is also the ground, the beginning of the new. Here, “[t]his result is therefore the truth. It is just as much immediacy as mediation [...] [f]or it is not a dormant third but, exactly like this unity, self-mediating movement and activity.” “So the result is the singular, the concrete, the subject.”⁶¹ It owns when needed its own subjectivity and negativity. The negation of negation is absolute negation; its absoluteness shows precisely in it running through every stage of development; it posits “the universal” in subjectivity and “the universal is posited in the subject.”⁶² It constitutes the mediating factor of every concrete thing’s development and unfolds all concrete things as an unbroken process of progression from lower to higher levels. If the first negation were not posited as an independent principle of subjectivity through the second negation (the negation of negation), it would have fallen into abstract opposition alongside with that immediate affirmation:

The negative appears as the mediating factor, because it holds itself and the immediate of which it is the negation within itself. In so far as these two determinations are taken as referring to each other externally in some

relation or other, the negative is only the formal mediating factor; but, as absolute negativity, the negative moment of absolute mediation is the unity which is subjectivity and soul.⁶³

On the one hand, the negation of negation melts the affirmative into a flow of negations, but on the other hand ceaselessly generates (or crystallizes) something new from the flow of negations, thereby making that first immediate affirmation become truly alive in a process of growing development. “[I]t begins from simple determinacies, and the following become ever richer and more concrete.”⁶⁴

[A]t each stage of further determination, the universal elevates the whole mass of its preceding content, not only not losing anything through its dialectical advance, or leaving it behind, but, on the contrary, carrying with itself all that it has gained, inwardly enriched and compressed.⁶⁵

This is what Hegel terms a process of “sublating” (*Aufheben*). The German word *Aufheben* has two basic senses: 1.) (from the ground) lift up, pick up, preserve; 2.) cancel out, withdraw (with a superseding order). The latter sense actually came from the first sense, because “to pick up or retrieve” something could mean to keep or preserve something, and could also mean “to shelve something higher up and away” or “to withdraw or put away something” (as we sometimes say: “put that away!”). Because this word in Hegel simultaneously carries these two opposite senses, it is exceedingly difficult to translate into Chinese. The rendering *yangqi* 扬弃 has its advantages insofar as it retains the two opposite meanings of *Aufheben* [*yang* 扬 means to lift up, to elevate; *qi* 弃 means to remove, to get rid of—Trans.]; moreover, it is also figurative with images easy to understand, as it is taken from the farming practice of winnowing: flinging the wheat straw up (*yang* 扬) into the wind, in order to blow the worthless chaff away (*qi* 弃) from the valuable grain, which is kept and preserved. However, it is also an insufficient term in some areas, mainly because it expresses an exceptionally speculative thought in a far too intuitive manner. When Hegel talks about the double meaning of *Aufheben*, he states: “[w]e ought rather to recognize here the speculative spirit of our language, which transcends the ‘either-or’ of mere understanding.”⁶⁶ The translation term *yang-qi* 扬弃, however, does not transcend this abstract manner of understanding: it is either the grain or the chaff. Actually, *Aufheben* is far from the meaning of “throw away one part and preserve one part,” but it is even further from the common misunderstanding that it means: “throw out the bad, keep the good.” When Marx aims his critique at Pierre Joseph Proudhon’s economic “dialectic,” he points out: “[t]he *good side* and the *bad side*, the *advantages* and *drawbacks*, taken together form for M. Proudhon the *contradiction* in every economic category. The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad.”⁶⁷ But this “dialectic” of Proudhon’s will only amount to nothing in Marx’s view, for:

What constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category. The very setting of the problem of eliminating the bad side cuts short the dialectical movement.⁶⁸

Feudal production also had two antagonistic elements which are likewise designated by the name of the *good side* and the *bad side* of feudalism, irrespective of the fact that it is always the bad side that in the end triumphs over the good side. It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle.⁶⁹

The dialectic considers the “bad” side and negative side of things as the impetus of movement in things. Those like Proudhon split up an organic process of self-negation into two “sides” that are mutually indifferent to one another, and this splitting up is also grounded by subjective evaluation and what amounts to essentially relative values (good and bad). Proudhon’s formulation seems literally unassailable on its face; it seems to promise people that all of the “good” things will remain in people’s hands while they avoid all that is messed up and ugly, but in actuality, this is nothing more than a delusional and fanciful dream, which at the very most reflects trepidation at the prospect of negating the status quo and especially of negating current values and their established standards of “good” and “bad,” while wishing to replace dialectic with “the purest of morals.”⁷⁰ This essentially conservative and metaphysical viewpoint is arguably quite far from Hegel’s *Aufheben* or even the complete opposite of it. Hegel calls this anxiety over the threat of making mistakes, fear of the truth, and points out:

Consciousness therefore suffers this violence at its own hands and brings to ruin its own restricted satisfaction. With the feeling of this violence, anxiety over the truth might well withdraw and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing. But this anxiety can find no rest; even if it wants to remain in thoughtless indolence, thought spoils the thoughtlessness, and its unrest disturbs the indolence; or even if it fortifies itself with a sensibility which assures that everything is to be found good as the type it is, this assurance likewise suffers violence at the hands of reason which straightaway finds that something is not good precisely because it is that type of thing. That is, the fear of truth may conceal itself from itself and from others behind the pretense that it is precisely the ardent zeal for truth which makes it so difficult, and indeed impossible, to find any truth other than vanity’s own truth of being always still cleverer than any thought that one gets either from oneself or from others.⁷¹

Hegel’s *Aufheben* is not nit-picking new things on the basis of old things, but a self-driven and active movement, which Hegel calls the life of spirit:

However, the life of spirit is not a life that is fearing death and austere saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it

sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet in its absolute disruption. —Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and lingering with it.⁷²

This translation name *yang-qi* 扬弃 does not express this sense of “looking the negative in the face and lingering with it,” for people associate it with an external set of technical means, an analytical operation (separating the grain from the chaff, the good from the bad). If we cannot find any better name to replace it with, we should at the very least adequately explain this concept. That is, we should clarify: sublation is not weighing old things with heavy hearts full of regret, looking for those that could be kept among those that must be eliminated; nor is it fearfully taking precautionary measures against future things to avoid bringing misfortune along with the new while enjoying new good things. On the contrary, sublation is negation, or more precisely, self-nihilation. It is throwing itself into death; it is throwing itself into absolute disruption and finding new life in it. Put otherwise, this negation or self-nihilation is itself rebirth: what negating old standards of value brings with it is not only the scourge of the new but also the prospects of the new; but old standards of value, whether willingly or not, are already negating themselves and turning themselves into the negative side of themselves, into empty shells with no values inside. It has already “opened up” from inside of itself the “path of doubt” or “the path of despair,” which puts consciousness on the path to truth.⁷³ This aside, sublation is not identifying and testing by current standards that which is in the course of developing; rather, we should say, sublation is the generative process of forming that very standard which alone is qualified to do the testing:

the skepticism which is directed at the entire range of consciousness as it appears, makes spirit for the first time competent to test what truth is, by this kind of skepticism bringing about a despair regarding the so-called natural conceptions, thoughts, and opinions. It is a matter of indifference whether one calls them one’s own or someone else’s, and with which consciousness that goes straightaway into examining matters is still suffused and burdened, which thus in fact renders consciousness incapable of achieving what it wants to undertake.⁷⁴

Sublation itself only appears to be of great urgency because the current standards for identifying truth are no longer current. Sublation, which raises us up from an animal life of pure materiality into a human life of spirituality, elevates us into active subjects.

Negation and purposiveness

Since negation (as noted) is the negation of and by itself or the negation of negation, that is, the process of negating a determinate potentiality and

consequently actualizing it, it goes without saying that this formulation already contains in-itself (Aristotle's and) Hegel's teleological thought.

This [end] is the negative of what is first, and, in its identity with that, it is the negativity of its own self; hence [it is] the unity within which both of these first [terms] are as ideal and as moments; [they are there] as sublated, i.e., as preserved at the same time.⁷⁵

Indeed, as long as we do not see negation as resulting in absolutely nothing, as long as we do not view negation like skepticism and Sophism see it, as an action resulting in an empty void of nothing, we will naturally derive the principle of purposiveness from that of negation. Since the result obtained from the negation of negation—a new affirmation—is a returning to the first affirmation, that is, since it is nothing more than the self-unfolding of the same thing, it was already potentially implied in the first affirmation in the first place. Some have noticed that Hegel's "[t]eleology is first expressed through the law of the negation of negation."⁷⁶ Most try to completely eliminate teleology from dialectics as "a factor of idealism."⁷⁷ But, what remains of the dialectic after this? As the end result, purpose is also the cause (ground) of itself; it is only that this cause is not external; it is not a contingent cause but is that end result itself in the form of potentially being. Thus, this process of the potential actualizing into the result becomes a necessary progression, whose necessity is not external and mechanical necessity but intrinsic teleological necessity. Mechanical necessity is outside of the moving body, in which case, what the moving body obeys is only random relations extrinsic to it. Such kinds of relations are not the inherent property of each moving body: "What is merely mediated is what it is not through itself but through an other, and therefore it is also merely something-contingent."⁷⁸ In Hegel's view, true necessity is that belonging to the purposive. The purposive contains mechanical necessity inside of itself and utilizes it as the means of its own actualization (as organisms utilize physico-chemical processes to sustain survival). For this necessity, whose ground is not found by chance and whose result is not obtained by contingent circumstances, we ought to say its cause was already its effect beforehand; its effect is reverting to the cause, as in the case of labor: "At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement."⁷⁹ In mechanical causality, cause and effect are two mutually extrinsic things; in purposive causality, the cause (the purpose) and the effect (the actualized purpose) are one and the same thing. Therefore, Hegel argues:

The purpose, on the contrary, is posited as containing within itself the determinacy (or what still appears there, in the context of causality, as otherness, i.e., the effect). In this way the purpose does not pass over, but preserves itself, in its operation; i.e., it brings only itself about and is at the end what it was in the beginning, or in its originality.⁸⁰

However, even though the purposive is immediately drawn from the principle of the negation of negation, there still remains one level of distinction between the purpose itself and the negation. Negation and the negation of negation could be called movement itself. Even though this movement is returning back to itself, to the beginning, it is still a continuous process that never stops, the inverse of which, the purpose, the end, is something fixed and static. Only the purpose persists in movement, consistently one and the same from beginning to end. What changes are the means (which are used up and consumed) and the end's mode of being (as either potential or actualized). It is precisely this static motionlessness as the cause of motions that renders the purpose the very subject of the whole movement: "[p]urpose is the immediate, the motionless, which is self-moving, or, is subject. Its abstract power to move is *being-for-itself*, or, pure negativity."⁸¹ Negation is the force that causes motion in what is purposive; it is "mediating" or "the formative" process, which is to say, it is the "means" that actualize the end: when the negative force is consumed and itself annihilated in the process of the negation, it reaches the negation of negation, whose positive expression is "the actualization of purpose." Thus, it is the purpose itself that is the universal linking beginning to end, while the means are the vanishing particulars. But the end also contains in-itself the means, so it is also a "concrete universal containing within itself the moment of particularity and of externality; it is therefore active and the impulse to repel itself from itself."⁸² Considered from the other side, only in cases where negation carries purposiveness and is aiming at some purpose is it a "genuinely *positive* working out of the beginning," and thus, "just as much a negative posture towards its beginning; namely, a negative posture towards its one-sided form, which is to be at first only *immediately*, or, to be *purpose*."⁸³ Only in such cases is it genuine negation; otherwise, it is simply blind negation, which, strictly speaking, cannot truly qualify as "negating," for it merely repels in external and mechanical fashion. Thus, negation must aim for a purpose from the very beginning, which is to say, negation is aimed at the potentiality and subjectivity of a purpose, for the reason that a purpose can only be a potential and subjective end to begin with, but it is nonetheless a purpose, because it is restless and insecure with this potentiality and subjective disposition to negate itself, to actualize itself, to become actuality and objectivity. A purpose without any wish to become actual is no purpose at all. What does a purpose rely upon to negate itself and thus actualize itself then? A purpose depends on switching to the objective, or as Hegel likes to say: a purpose rushes toward the objective with which it "deals." A purpose utilizes what is objective and "eats them up." Thus, in one respect, this is a process of the purpose using things external to it to negate itself, for, to deal with objective entities, one must first lay subjective purpose aside and come to consider the means to reach the end, to consider "the technical issues." In another respect, however, this is also the purpose negating the externalities of those that are external to it, which is a process of "transforming" them "into its own being," and hence a process of purpose returning to itself through the

negation of the negative. Therefore, the process of integrating the purposive (or realizing the end) is identical with that of negating the negative. The purposive nature of this process is merely the positive expression of it. The ends (potential end and actualized end) make up the two ends of this “deduction,” while negation (and the negation of the negative) constitutes the “middle term” of this deduction.

From here, we may also understand why Hegel calls the negation of the negative “the innermost, objective moment” of a life that begets “a subject, a person and freedom.” This is only understanding it from the purposive sense of what is innermost within it. Although the negation of the negativity already reverts itself to immediate positivity, it still has not achieved the distinct expression of this positivity, for which reason people still might understand it as some sort of mechanical, purposeless and simply cyclical process like the alternation of winter and summer and the succession of night and day. At the very least, some understand it as a process that goes on unaware of itself. Hegel himself also uses the negation of the negative to explain some at first seemingly purposeless advances in “ontology” like “being-nothing-becoming” and “qualitative-quantitative-intensive.” However, in Hegel’s view, because the negations in these processes do not show distinct purposiveness, they still only remain stuck in the non-essential sphere of “semblance.”

The immediate being of things is here represented as a sort of rind or curtain behind which the essence is concealed [...] A mere rushing about from one quality to another, and a mere advance from the qualitative to the quantitative and back again, is not the last word; on the contrary, there is something that abides in things, and this is, in the first instance, their essence.⁸⁴

Negation or the negation of negation only shows necessity in “the essential,” but to take the next step of showing itself as an intrinsic and necessary principle, that is, a principle of freedom, the negation of negation must advance from the essence to “the concept,” which alone distinctly posits its sense of purposiveness. Because of this, quantitative change and qualitative change as a form of the negation of the negative only contains potential purposiveness in Hegel; its purpose is not embodied in a process but instead stands outside of the process or behind the process, enlightening it as some sort of “divine wisdom,” “cosmic intention” or “cunning of reason.” For instance, water does not seem to contain in itself the “purpose” of having to become steam, it simply has no other choice but to transform into steam when the external conditions are present. This passive sort of spontaneous process relying on external conditions to be moved, in Hegel’s view, cannot count as self-negation or the negation of negation; moreover, it is also untrue, for at the very end it results in reducing intrinsic qualitative change to extrinsic quantitative change. But such viewpoints are hands-bound as to what to do in cases of “leaps” of Nature, all of which are felt as “unexpected.”⁸⁵ It is as if they are

being deceived by some sort of cunning trick. Inversely, Hegel insists that qualitative change is originally irreducible to quantitative change, for between them there is an “incommensurable” difference.⁸⁶ In other words, qualitative change is absolutely negative and absolutely self-contradictory for quantitative change. Quantitative change appears at first to be a process “totally indifferent” to qualitative change:

When a quantitative alteration takes place it appears, to start with, to be something quite innocent; but something quite different lurks behind it, and this seemingly innocent alteration of the quantitative is like a ruse with which to catch the qualitative.⁸⁷

In truth, because of this, this “ruse” should not be understood as some sort of external purpose outside of the process, or some sort of skill standing behind the process, but as the “negativity of finite things” that “is their own dialectic.”⁸⁸ It is also the first external reflection of the internal purposiveness inherent to things themselves. This is the Truth implied by the “leaps” of Nature: “Every birth and every death, far from being a protracted gradualness, is rather its breaking off and a leap from quantitative into qualitative alteration.”⁸⁹ What such a leap posits is the hierarchical (stratifying) determination of the qualities that are intrinsic to natural things. When movement leaps up to a new quality, quantity also unfolds on a new level (stratum) as the measure of the old, lower stratum goes into disuse (just as the laws of mechanics cannot simply be used in the biological stratum). Thus, movement in the natural world, far from being a simple increase or decrease in quantity, is instead a “historical” process of rising and developing from a lower level (of quality) to a higher level (of quality), a process that in essence has directionality and purposiveness. Even though in concrete settings it is very hard to say a process is a rising development from a lower level to a higher level (like water becoming steam), on the macroscopic scale, the qualitative “incommensurability” between each form of movement (on each stratum physical, chemical, biological, social and intellectual) indeed makes a difference of hierarchical grade, and such hierarchical divisions are only meaningful when the overarching purposiveness of natural development (natural history) is under consideration. In other words, since the natural world gave birth to humankind and the human species is conditioned by all previous forms of movement (physical, chemical and biological, which are all the means of human survival), then we have reasons to view Nature at least in the logical sense as being the purposeful history of genesis from lower levels to higher levels in the direction of human beings.

For this reason, Hegel also points out in the *Philosophy of Nature*: “Nature is to be regarded as a *system of stages*, the one proceeding of necessity out of the other.”⁹⁰ “[I]t is the dialectical [Concept] which is the inner principle of the same, and guides its stages forward.”⁹¹ Even though Hegel holds a different view on the evolutionist conception of Nature, he still insists: “Nature

is *implicitly* [an *sich*] a living whole"; in which "the development of the [Concept] in accordance with its determination is to be grasped. This determination might be regarded as its goal or purpose."⁹² His entire philosophy of Nature sets out precisely to reveal Nature as just such a system of movement from lower to higher levels according to a purpose, indeed, a system in which even "the stones cry out and lift themselves up to spirit."⁹³ Here, assuredly we find ravings of theology speculations of mysticism wrapped inside along with many profound and thought-provoking thoughts even for today. I would like here to leave aside those biased opinions of Hegel about God and "the absolute," and momentarily look at what kind of inspiration these thoughts can bring us.

Western philosophy rising up from ancient Greece ran all the way through the bifurcation of mechanism and teleology. The abstracting spirit of *logos* (like Pythagorean number) and the mystifying spirit of *nous* (like Socrates's *daimon*) in ancient Greece could be seen as the representatives of these two biases. It took Aristotle's synthetic integration of the material cause and the final cause to make mechanical functions become subordinate moments under the purposive:

The necessary in nature, then, is plainly what we call by the name of matter, and the changes in it. Both causes must be stated by the physicist, but especially the end; for that is the cause of the matter, not vice versa.⁹⁴

The opposition of mechanism and teleology also pervades, to varying degrees, the "double truth" doctrine (of philosophical truth and theological truth), which people endlessly debated in medieval Christian theology, and the different proofs of the existence of God (especially the cosmological and teleological proofs) as well. The modern Western European mechanistic worldview not only emerged in connection with the achievement of mathematical mechanics in the natural sciences but also in connection with intense discussions over free will. Protestants like John Calvin turned human beings' free will into some sort of mechanically necessary behavior through rigorous arguments; the French materialists then revoked the little right of freedom left over in God's possession. Even those non-materialist philosophers like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz portrayed God as a brilliant mathematician and physicist. Teleology had been driven out of the sphere of Nature altogether in deism. The only remains of teleology left over in the form of "external teleology," that is, in a "first mover" outside of the natural world, could actually be seen as a logical conclusion to mechanism itself. The revitalization of internal teleology at the level of the understanding was Kant's big accomplishment. Kant, grounded in the organism under the viewpoint of "reflective judgment," subordinated that inorganic and mechanical world of Nature to the biological ends of self-preservation and reproduction, then subordinated the biological world's blind ratio of the strong consuming the weak (through labor) to the ends of human culture,

and finally subordinated the wickedness evolving out of human civilization to the ultimate ends of human spirit, that is, to the end of moral theology.⁹⁵ Kant's thought here of a system of ends assuredly inspired Hegel to great effect. Every time Hegel speaks of "development" and "process" and "history," he always indicates such a purposefully unfolding system from lower to higher levels, from mechanical and extensional matter to intentional and spiritual form, instead of indicating a blind temporal continuation of a simply accumulative piecing together of parts. In the modern age, scientism's split with humanism dismantled once again this speculative unity of Hegel's as the opposition of mechanism and teleology was pushed to extremely sharpened degrees. Once the natural sciences lose purpose, they become hostile to humanity, and as they come to occupy humanities like history, political science, ethics and aesthetics, humans will resort to irrational and anti-scientific madness to oppose them. This is the modern condition of Western thought that Edmund Husserl characterized as "the crisis of European science" or "the crisis of humanity."

Aiming at mechanism's split with external teleology in the natural sciences, Friedrich Engels said: "Already in Kant and Hegel *inner* purpose is a protest against dualism."⁹⁶ Today, as this fracture expands and deepens in the humanities and in philosophy, the reevaluation of teleology is visibly needed more and more by the day. For a long period of time, people have become accustomed to seeing teleological doctrine as the tool of theology (theological teleology) and have attempted to leave aside human beings' relationship to the purpose of human society to "objectively" and "without prejudicial bias" examine the natural world and human history. Looking at problems from such a scientific and mechanically reflectionistic standpoint, if seen through to the end, will not find any "progress" in the world, nor any "development from lower to higher levels," nor genuine "history" even, because standards for measuring "progress" and "regress," "development" and "backwardness," "higher level" and "lower level" can only be posited on the basis of teleology and the values brought about by it, and cannot derive simply from mechanical causality and temporal sequence. Charles Darwin's "evolutionary theory" actually already implies an unspoken premise: The human being is the end; the human being's brain that is capable of producing thought, spirit and subjectivity is the purpose of all natural development. With this premise, evolutionary theory can divide the biological world into hierarchical levels; the closer organisms get to human beings and especially the closer animals get to human beings in brain structure, the higher they climb, and if the inverse is the case, then the lower they fall down the ladder. If this standard is done away with, and objective description is conducted simply by the theory of survival competition or survival fitness, then there is no "evolutionary progress" remaining to describe; all biological "advancing" would all arguably be just as much "retreating." In the same way, Helmuth Plessner criticizes some of the Freudian cultural anthropologists in *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, namely for thinking that the human is a diseased

animal thrown off from his vital balance and natural path, fallen prey to some organ parasitically growing on him:

Cerebral parasitism, possibly caused by a disorder of the internal secretion process, gave him the poisoned chalice of intelligence, insight, knowledge, and consciousness of the world—this consciousness, the spirit, may be nothing more than a grand illusion, the self-deception of a biologically degenerate creature sucked dry by brain polyps. The only purpose of the crutches or artificial limbs of tools and culture is to secure his survival. And even that has a negative side. For even if this unreal world supports a form of life that has become too weak, it is equally the expression of this weakness, is itself sick.⁹⁷

Those adapting to the environing surround would not be “more highly advanced” than the extinct creatures and those still facing extinction, nor would later progeny be more advanced than forerunning prototypes. Moreover, the mode of the entire cosmic movement would not be divided into such a hierarchical system of fields like mechanics, thermodynamics, electromagnetics (chemistry), nuclear physics, biology, social sciences (history) and cognitive sciences, and would not be seen as a process of development of natural history, whose ground would be teleology. When Nature itself does not show its own purposiveness (like saying, the natural world “prior to the birth of humankind”), we cannot truly say it has history (even though it exists in the continuum of time, time is not equal to history). “With man we enter *history*. Animals also have a history [...] This history, however, is made for them.”⁹⁸ It is only possible to speak of “natural history” when it is said in a sense relative to human beings, to human purposes, to human mentality: Nature’s becoming in the direction of humanity. Only the human being, the human mind and the development of personal freedom count as the absolute purpose of all process and all being in the end. Whatever else is in itself at the very most just relative purpose (like the survival instinct of organisms), which is ultimately no purpose at all. The entire world of Nature cannot manifest the slightest “historicity” without having birthed the human being, who alone gives it the sense of advancing (evolving) and developing and imparts it with the hierarchical criteria of superior and inferior levels. No matter how infinite the cosmos is in space and time, nothing in it is meaningful save in relation to this “instantaneous interval” of the human species, because only with human beings is Nature becoming conscious of itself and tendentially turning to itself; only human beings reveals all of Nature’s potential attributes and hence shows the essential attributes of Nature and exhibits Nature as Nature. Thus, temporally speaking, Nature exists prior to humanity, and spatially speaking, human beings are but one part of Nature, but logically and essentially speaking, only human beings are the whole of Nature.

When Marx combines the natural sciences together with the humanities by aid of human beings’ sensuous activities, that is, industry and practice,

he undoubtedly already sees purposiveness as the necessary prerequisite for making historical considerations of the natural world.

Industry is the *actual*, historical relation of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man [...] All history is the preparation for “man” to become the object of sensuous consciousness, and for the needs of “man as man” to become [natural, sensuous] needs. History itself is a real part of natural history-of nature’s coming to be man. Natural science will in time subsume under itself the science of man, just as the science of man will subsume under itself natural science: there will be one science.⁹⁹

Of course, purposiveness in Marx is posited on the basis of human sensuous practical activity and productive labor, which is nowhere near the same thing as “theological teleology.” That said, such purposiveness still does not exclude judgments of ethical, moral and value-related purpose, and does not cancel out the description of history as a process of development, of evolution and of “justice,” because in his view, the ultimate purpose of human beings’ productive labor is not just the fulfillment of the animalistic material needs of human survival, but is furthermore the all-around development and perfecting of human beings’ essential powers, especially of human beings’ advanced mental constitution. Only in the teleological perspective can we see that “human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape.”¹⁰⁰ The highly developed offer a key to understanding the lowly developed. The ultimate purpose of human beings and human society is the key to understanding the hierarchical system of Nature’s historical development.

Hegel’s concept of purposiveness could be seen as the result of this consideration of Nature and history starting from the ultimate purpose of human beings and human society, which is the so-called turning point of self-negation. “In this turning point of the method, the course of cognition returns at the same time back into itself.”¹⁰¹ Even though he understands and articulates this ultimate purpose as God, absolute spirit and its “cognition of itself,” what remains valuable is, through “injecting” the free activity experienced by human beings themselves into the understanding of all other natural entities, “inorganic nature” “is *in-itself* the same as what life is *for-itself*.”¹⁰² Hegel reveals the innermost and mostly still potential activity of objective things, which is the very nature of “self-negation.” Hegel transcended the mechanical, positivist natural science of his time, viewing the natural world and human society as one unified living organic whole and composed a methodical system with his conception of this organic whole in the *Science of Logic*, which is itself an organic, living system of categories. Marx mentioned that the Scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus asked himself “‘whether matter cannot think.’ In performing this wonder, Duns had recourse to God’s omnipotence, that is, he made theology itself preach materialism.”¹⁰³ Hegel investigated this theme on a grander scale and demonstrated thinking to be matter’s essential attribute, the purpose toward which matter’s internal activity and self-negating impulse

tend to move. He demonstrates that matter only shows the deepest nature that is inside of itself when it attains thought and consequently returns to itself on a higher level. Thus, this sort of speculation spattered with hints of pantheism not only becomes a shy materialism but also borders on dialectical materialism.

We may observe from this that Hegel's principle of the negative and of the negation of negation actually already contains the principle of inner purposive activity. Thus, it became a principle of necessity. Negation without purposiveness in his view is nothing more than a blind and random phenomenon, which is not true negation at all but instead merely external mechanical functioning (repelling). In this understanding, the negation of negation tracks down its true source from an objective law of natural development and movement, which is human activity and human subjectivity, including the self-conscious activity, practical activity and nature of conceptual freedom inside human beings.

Notes

- 1 Hegel 2010, 333.
- 2 Aristotle 1991, 24.
- 3 Hegel 1894, 139–40.
- 4 Hegel 2018, 23; italics in original.
- 5 Hegel 1896, 197.
- 6 Marx & Engels 1956; italics in original.
- 7 Laozi 2014, 40.
- 8 Ibid., 1.
- 9 Ibid., 16.
- 10 Wang 2020.
- 11 Zhuangzi 2014, 23.11.
- 12 Pei 1958.
- 13 Laozi 2014, 45.
- 14 Ibid., 11.
- 15 Pei 1958.
- 16 Cheng 2000, vol. 25.
- 17 Wang 2009, 37.
- 18 Wang 2014, 1.9.
- 19 Ibid., 1.10.
- 20 Cheng 2000, vol. 25.
- 21 Zhuangzi 2014, 2.8.
- 22 Ibid., 23.11.
- 23 Ibid., 2.8.
- 24 Sengzhao 1988.
- 25 Wang 2010, 13.
- 26 Wang 2014, 7.3.
- 27 Hegel 2010, 78.
- 28 Ibid., 78.
- 29 Zhang 1984, 163–4.

- 30 Levine 1987, 39.
- 31 Hegel 2010, 77.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Hegel 1894, 64.
- 34 Hegel 2010, 379.
- 35 Hegel 1981, 106 (translator's footnote).
- 36 Spinoza 2018, 80.
- 37 Hegel 2010, 78.
- 38 Sartre 1993, 47; italics in original.
- 39 Hegel 2010, 75.
- 40 Henrich 1989, 218.
- 41 Office of Research on Philosophy and the History of Western Philosophy 1982, 55.
- 42 See (Hegel 2018, 78).
- 43 Hegel 2010, 60.
- 44 Ibid., 89.
- 45 Hegel 2018, 33.
- 46 Hegel 2010, 89.
- 47 Ibid., 339.
- 48 Ibid., 346.
- 49 Ibid., 347.
- 50 Ibid., 353.
- 51 Ibid., 346.
- 52 Wang 1985, 68.
- 53 Hegel 2010, 745.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Hegel 1991, 325.
- 56 Hegel 2010, 73.
- 57 Ibid., 71.
- 58 Ibid., 35.
- 59 Ibid., 33.
- 60 Ibid., 267.
- 61 Ibid., 747.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid., 746.
- 64 Ibid., 750.
- 65 Ibid., 750.
- 66 Hegel 1991, 154.
- 67 Marx 1999; italics in original.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Hegel 2018, 54.
- 72 Ibid., 21.
- 73 Ibid., 52.
- 74 Ibid., 53.
- 75 Hegel 1991, 306–7.
- 76 Gretskey 1981–2, 34.
- 77 Ibid., 37.
- 78 Hegel 1991, 221.

- 79 Marx 1999–2.
- 80 Hegel 1991, 280.
- 81 Hegel 2018, 217; italics in original.
- 82 Hegel 2010, 656.
- 83 Hegel 2018, 16; italics in original.
- 84 Hegel 1991, 176.
- 85 Hegel 1991, 289.
- 86 Ibid., 293.
- 87 Ibid., 171.
- 88 Ibid., 282.
- 89 Hegel 2010, 322.
- 90 Hegel 1970, 212; italics in original.
- 91 Ibid. [Translation modified].
- 92 Ibid., 216. [Translation modified]. Italics in original.
- 93 Ibid., 206.
- 94 Aristotle 1941, 693.
- 95 See (Kant 2007, §82–4).
- 96 Engels 1934; italics in original.
- 97 Plessner 2019, 290–1.
- 98 Marx & Engels 2001, 330; italics in original.
- 99 Marx & Engels 1988, 110–1; italics in original.
- 100 Marx & Engels 1973.
- 101 Hegel 2010, 746.
- 102 Hegel 1991, 293; italics in original.
- 103 Marx 1923, 105.

2 Negation and subjectivity

The word “subjectivity” (*Subjektivität*) allows two renderings in Chinese, *zhutixing* 主体性 and *zhuguanxing* 主观性.¹ These two renderings of the word are often quite different in actual usage and alternatively render different settings. Of course, only subjective, abstract thought can have subjectivity (*zhu-ti-xing* 主体性) in Hegel, even though objective (*keguan* 客观) substance (God) also has his subjectivity (*zhu-guan-xing* 主观性), so these are ultimately two senses of one and the same thing. In Marxism, subjectivity became the essential attribute of the actual human work of material production, or sensuous practical activity. In order to extract the inner nucleus of the dialectic from Hegel’s system of objective idealism, it is necessary to distinguish these two senses of subjectivity and examine how this dialectic emerges in the inverted form of idealism.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel points out: “everything hangs on grasping and expressing the true not just as *substance* but just as much as *subject*.”² “[T]he substance is itself essentially the negative, in part as the difference and the determination of the content, and in part as a *simple* differentiating, which is to say, as the self and knowing as such.”³ Clearly, subjectivity and negativity have equal significance in Hegel. While one is said in the ontological sense, the other is said in the logical sense. The negative is substance acting as subject, which “is this power only by looking the negative in the face and lingering with it. This lingering is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is the same as what in the preceding was called the subject.”⁴ Hegel frequently compares this subjectivity of substance to “life,” whose “vitality” comes from inner “pain” or “feeling of something-negative.” “Living things have the privilege of pain compared with the lifeless; even for them, a single determinacy becomes the feeling of something-negative, because as living things they do have, within them, the *universality of living vitality* that is beyond the singular.”⁵ Another formulation Hegel frequently employs is “soul.” The dialectic of the negative as such is the soul of all activation and self-movement, and “the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit appear, in contrast, as applied logic, so to speak, for the Logic is their animating soul.”⁶ Reason is the “*nous*” of the world and so on. These formulations all immediately express the roots of the Hegelian

dialectic of the negative in the ancient Greek spirit of *nous*. However, whether it is “life” or “the soul,” in either case these are still just a few metaphorically colorful terms in Hegel. In the chapter on “Life” in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, there is one long passage dedicated to explaining that he is not speaking of “life” in the sense conveyed by the natural sciences but rather of “the life of logic,” which “the concept” presupposes as “the immediate Idea” that is life.⁷ However, this explanation is certainly a stretch too far. But, when applying materialism to the reading of Hegel, Vladimir Lenin uncovers a valuable thought from it: “Life gives rise to the brain. Nature is reflected in the human brain. By checking and applying the correctness of these reflections in his practice and technique, man arrives at objective truth.”⁸ But Hegel himself stood totally opposed to this sort of a-logical, natural interpretation and spoke out against any need to explain the formation of life from the process of Nature, insisting instead that “the Idea of life” could be logically deduced from the Concept. However, those illustrations and treatments he gives to life and organism are nothing more than some “logical” metaphors, a few symbolic representations. At times they are even, as Lenin said, merely “play with organic Notions” and “the comic in Hegel.”⁹ As a matter of fact, Hegel himself had said: “God is more than living, he is spirit.”¹⁰ What the *Logic* investigates is pure thought, not (life’s) impulse. Thus, the Idea and its subjectivity in Hegel cannot be determined with a vague representation like “life” or “soul,” but must rather be understood as “thought, spirit, self-consciousness.”¹¹ So, Hegel’s thought of subjectivity must first be considered beginning with “self-consciousness,” the innermost ground of thinking spirit, and this consideration will show us that the dialectic of the negative in Hegel is nothing other than the essential characteristic of (human) self-consciousness: self-consciousness constructs the entire external world with this essential characteristic of itself while assimilating this world into the objective self-movement of “the Concept.”

The negative as self-consciousness

The entirety of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* encompasses several large parts, “consciousness,” “self-consciousness,” “reason,” “spirit,” “religion” and “absolute knowledge,” but substantively speaking, all of it is the generative shaping of “self-consciousness” and the history of its development. Konrad Cramer sheds light on a nearly unnoticed by now and seemingly paradoxical fact in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that the phenomenology of spirit does not offer a theory of consciousness but of self-consciousness.¹² It is true that self-consciousness is indeed the secret to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his entire philosophy. It is for this reason that Marx concentrates his analysis of both Hegel’s dialectic and entire philosophy simply on the sense and role of self-consciousness in Hegel’s philosophy. Worth noting is, when Marx describes the broader outline of Hegel’s system in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he does not arrange the contents completely in line with Hegel’s original

division. Hegel's headings were originally divided in the following way: (A) Consciousness; (B) Self-consciousness; (C) Reason; under Reason again there is (AA) Reason; (BB) Spirit; (CC) Religion; (DD) Absolute Knowing. Marx, however, revises them in the following way: (A) Self-Consciousness; I. Consciousness, II. Self-consciousness, III. Reason; (B) Spirit; (C) Religion; (D) Absolute Knowing.¹³ He later postulates in *The German Ideology*, "[i]n *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in this Bible or this Book, Hegel transfigures the individual into 'consciousness' and the world into 'object.' Life and history are thus transfigured in their diversity, into *relations of consciousness to object*."¹⁴ That is (1) the relation of consciousness to the object *as truth* or as relation *to the truth* as mere object; (2) the relation of consciousness, insofar as it is *the true*, to the object; (3) the *true relation* of consciousness with the truth (*wahres Verhalten des Bewusstseins zur Wahrheit*). In its entirety, it is a process of "absolute consciousness (the holy Father) externalizing himself (the holy Son) through which he becomes conscious of himself (the holy Ghost)." In other words, this is the process of absolute spirit's self-consciousness. This highlighting and underscoring of self-consciousness assuredly provide a much more accurate grasp of the substance to Hegel's whole philosophy, which Hegel himself also failed to clearly state and even at times intentionally tried to obfuscate.

For the reasons just mentioned, when we run into "negation" and "the negation of the negation" everywhere in the *Science of Logic*, we ought to be viewing them as neither more nor less than logical articulations of "consciousness" and "self-consciousness." In the same way that negation is nothing less than the negation of the negation (negation of and by itself), consciousness is nothing less than self-consciousness. The dialectic of the negative as active subject is to be understood precisely as the activity and subjectivity of self-consciousness: "Just as *entities, objects*, appear as *thought-entities*, so the *subject* is always *consciousness* or *self-consciousness* [...] the distinct forms of estrangement which make their appearance are, therefore, only various forms of consciousness and self-consciousness."¹⁵ Of course, in the *Science of Logic*, along with the philosophy of nature and philosophy of mind, Hegel ordinarily avoids reducing the active subject to the agency of subjective self-consciousness, but this is in actuality only for the sake of raising the subjective self-consciousness of the finite being to the objective self-consciousness of the absolute, to the self-knowing activity of objective spirit. "The struggle of finite self-consciousness with absolute self-consciousness" undergoes historical and logical development but stops in Hegel's own philosophy:

[f]inite self-consciousness has ceased to be finite; and in this way absolute self-consciousness [...] has attained the reality it previously lacked. It [absolute self-consciousness] is all of world history until now in general and the history of philosophy in particular, which represents only this struggle. It appears to have reached its goal.¹⁶

We can clearly see here the alienated form of Hegel's own sense of consciousness when he examines the entire history of the world on the basis of self-consciousness. We intend to analyze this alienated form later, but let us first look at why Hegel understands the negative as self-consciousness and how he understands the negative as self-consciousness.

The question about why we should understand the negative as self-consciousness is actually that of why self-consciousness should be understood as the negative, since for Hegel self-consciousness had already been a philosophical theme present in the modern age ever since Descartes and already began to reveal its negative tendency in the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, but only insofar as they saw the negative as an attribute or function of self-consciousness (the thing in-itself, substance), a "predicate" of self-consciousness, and not as self-consciousness itself ("the subject" not "the predicate"). Therefore, this self-consciousness of self-sufficient being-for-itself is still only independent being-for-itself embracing negativity toward whatever stands opposed to it.¹⁷ Hegel carries on and carries forward precisely the tradition of the forerunners of classical German idealism, attempting to further subjectivize the substance of self-consciousness. Because of this, understanding the negative as self-consciousness is a fundamental standpoint of Hegel's. This touches on his idealist point of view on the substance of the world and the relation between logical articulation and idealist ontology. We will sort this relation out in volume 3. So here there still remains the second question: how does Hegel understand the negative as self-consciousness?

As we have already said, Hegel's negation is more accurately described as "self-negation" or "negation of and by itself," namely the negation of negation as an absolute principle. In Sartre's words, this negation is "forever saying 'no' to oneself." Of course in Hegel, this is by no means repelling oneself; rather, this saying of "no" to oneself already implies the saying of "yes" to a certain stage of oneself, which turns this principle simultaneously into one of absolute affirmation. This sort of negation in Hegel's view is not to be found in the inorganic world of Nature—so long as we are not reflecting on it. On the contrary, only human consciousness is in essence the negation of and by itself and consciousness is in substance self-conscious precisely because it is the negation of and by itself.

Consciousness is the self-negating of negation, which becomes the theme that Hegel tackles in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He attempts to prove that consciousness is thought of as that which differentiates self and object, and hence consciousness is that which negates the object and is negated by the object, but this development of consciousness constituted by mutual negation shows precisely that consciousness is effectively the negation of and by itself.

Consciousness is in the first place "Sensuous Certainty." Here, self (my sensation) is opposed to the sensuous object. Consciousness so-called refers in the first place to becoming conscious of this opposition and holding

this difference in reflection; lacking self-awareness of this minimum disparity between self and things counts as being “unconscious.” But reflection discovers immediately that the sensuous object is uncertain, fluctuating and vanishing, in the midst of which only the universal “this” still represents the object outside of myself. Meanwhile, the self of sensation is no less uncertain, in the midst of which only the universal “I” still represents the sense of the ineffable (unlimited) in my mind. So, sensuous certainty in this form of opposition of subject and object is sublated and replaced by the opposition between the universal “I” in general and the “object” in general. Hegel in the same way describes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* consciousness’s gradual swallowing up of “the thing,” then “the unconditional universal” (substance), and then the play of forces, which thereby gradually raises consciousness from the phenomenal world up into “the supersensible world.” Hegel points out, this very process demonstrates that it is by “negation” itself that consciousness transcends sensuous experience and consequently reaches thinking in the form of the understanding while preparing the universal foundation for self-consciousness to become conscious of itself.

Negation is essentially a moment of the universal, and it, or mediation, is therefore within the universal the *universal difference*. It is expressed in *law* as the *stable* picture of unstable appearance. The supersensible world is thus a *motionless realm of laws*.¹⁸

But Hegel insists that in this motionless and unchanging supersensible world of abstract understanding, consciousness now discovers a transformative process of exchange that it had attempted to eliminate from the sensible (phenomenal) world. However, this time, the continuing exchange and alteration is no longer the transformative alternations of the phenomenal world, but instead appears as another supersensible “law,” and hence is called “absolute” or “pure” exchange itself. This is the “second law,” that is, the dialectical law, which makes up the “second supersensible world,” that is, the world of reason. Hegel attributes the emergence of such consciousness to an “inversion” by virtue of which consciousness becomes self-consciousness for the very first time. In other words, consciousness turns toward itself and becomes self-consciousness because consciousness finally achieves the “inversion” of itself at the stage of understanding. Originally, the understanding wished to bypass (or cut through) the phenomenal world or perception to peer into the true world beyond the senses, which would have effectively amounted to the inversion of the phenomenal world and of perception. The understanding takes the unsettling flux of the phenomenal world to be subjective illusion in the attempt to grasp the fixed and unchanging objective law. However, the understanding gradually learns

[t]here is a *second law*, whose content is opposed to what was previously called law, that is to say, it is opposed to the enduring self-consistent

difference. This is because this new law instead expresses the *becoming-unequal* of what is equal and the *becoming-equal* of the *unequal*.¹⁹

This then effectuates an inversion of and by itself, that is, the inversion of the first inversion. The principles of changes and fluctuations in the perceptual world “have pushed their way into the supersensible itself.”²⁰ Making a recovery in the second supersensible world, they simultaneously peel off the outer shell of perception and become “the pure flux, or *the opposition within itself, the contradiction*.”²¹ This is, in other words, pure negation, negation of and by itself.

*I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so, what is immediately for me is this: What is distinguished is not distinguished. I, the like pole, repel myself away from myself; but what is distinguished, what is posited as not the same as me, is, while it is differentiated, immediately no difference for me. Consciousness of an other, of an object as such, is indeed itself necessarily self-consciousness, being-reflected into itself, consciousness of its own self, in its otherness.*²²

For this reason, only self-consciousness is the *truth* of consciousness in general (consciousness of the thing). This is the level of consciousness that Kant effectively already taps into, thinking in the form of reason. However, Kant himself never become conscious of this one point, namely that he still had been understanding reason from the standpoint of the understanding. This dialectical infinite, or this absolute restlessness of pure self-motion, in his view, “was in the *inner* that it itself first freely emerged.”²³ Consequently, his self-consciousness despite already having the infinite acting capacity of the negation of and by itself, was ultimately restricted by the phenomenal world of subjective experience. Only by breaking this limitation does consciousness truly enter the field of self-consciousness.

Hans-Georg Gadamer found the crucial role of this inversion during the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness to be of utmost importance in Hegel. He points out that what Hegel mainly explores in the doctrine of the “Inverted World” is: “how consciousness becomes self-consciousness, i.e., how consciousness becomes conscious of the fact that it is self-consciousness.”²⁴ The inverted world, that is, the inversion of the inversion, turns the object of consciousness into a dialectical and active object, showing “the true reality is that of life, which moves itself within itself.”²⁵ He believes such an inversion is the teleological viewpoint of the living organism: even if a Sir Isaac Newton for biology will one day appear among us revealing the “law of forces” in organisms and life,

[o]ur understanding of the world will not cease to judge “teleologically.” For us, and not only for Hegel, the transition here is necessary, i.e., the progression to another, higher form of knowing as well as to a higher

form of what is known. Indeed, in a decisive sense, that which we look upon as living we must view as a self. A “self,” however, means self-identity in all undifferentiatedness and all self-differentiation. The mode of being of what lives corresponds in this to the mode of being of the knowledge which understands what lives. For consciousness of what is as a self has the same structure of differentiation which is no differentiation. Thus the transition to self-consciousness has essentially been completed.²⁶

This variant of “inversion” in Hegel indeed has vital, teleological significance; it embodies this internal structure of “turning back into itself” in the negation of the negation. However, it is still too much of a rush for Gadamer to inject the living and purposive viewpoint into this transition of consciousness toward self-consciousness. Hegel did not himself explain the transition of consciousness toward self-consciousness through the concepts of “life” and “teleology.” Precisely to the contrary, consciousness of life and consciousness of purpose in Hegel can only be explained through the structure of self-consciousness. In fact, Hegel only mentions “life” in one place in the entire chapter of “Forces and the Understanding”: “This simple infinity, or the absolute concept, is to be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal bloodstream.”²⁷ The word “life” here can only be understood as a metaphor not unlike “soul” and “bloodstream,” not as strict terminology. In fact, Hegel only deals with life after “self-consciousness as such,” well after entering the stage of “self-consciousness.” It should be clear from this that Hegel does not need consciousness of life to mediate the transition of consciousness toward self-consciousness (even though consciousness of life is also rightfully due to consciousness and self-consciousness), and instead, he only needs the logical essence of consciousness’s negation of and by itself to make it happen, which is where Hegel’s philosophy differs from a simple philosophy of life (like Wilhelm Dilthey’s). Similar misunderstandings to Gadamer’s are also apparent among Chinese researchers, see (Hua 1983, 16). The crucial point from which such misunderstandings arise is confusing life and knowledge of life. What Hegel is talking about here is not life itself but that shape of consciousness or of self-consciousness that views the object to be life.

In fact, in Hegel’s view, the concept of “consciousness” already analytically contains its negation of itself. Cramer points out that Hegel’s proposition of consciousness, that consciousness is both self-differentiating and self-relating, must therefore be understood as a proposition that analytically needs to be true.²⁸ However, I hold that this proposition, that consciousness is both self-differentiating and self-relating, should be more precisely expressed as “consciousness is self-transcending and self-restoring” or “negation of and by itself,” which alone can contain the active meaning of consciousness referring to itself in Hegel. Because, as stated, what Hegel calls consciousness is consciousness that differentiates self and object. That is, consciousness makes this difference in relation to an object, and the difference between this

relation to an object and an object whose positing is external to this relation cannot belong to a conscious description of theory that is attributed to consciousness from the outside, but must instead be attributed to consciousness by itself. Consciousness is then making this difference, and since it is consciousness making this difference, it is also consciously referring to itself.²⁹ During this differentiation, consciousness belongs to the self-side but is also conscious of the other-side opposite to itself while including the other inside of itself, so it goes beyond the opposition of self and object, and goes beyond that self which opposes the object. This also means consciousness is the transcending (self-negating) of the conscious (self). Clearly, consciousness “analytically” contains self-consciousness. However, worth noticing is, this “analytic proposition” of consciousness is not an analytic proposition in the traditional sense of linguistic analysis (like Kant’s example, “all bodies are extended”), but is rather an analytic proposition in the special sense of dialectical logic; though it also deduces itself “without appealing to anything outside of itself,” it does not however derive its transcendence over itself by statically analyzing the semantics of the word “consciousness” (semantically speaking, the word “consciousness” does not necessarily imply the meaning of transcendence over itself); rather, this concrete concept of consciousness only contains the motivating force (the impulse) to transcend itself in the mode of *potential*, so this internal structure of consciousness only actively displays itself in the step-by-step process of consciousness unfolding into *actuality*. Consciousness transcending and negating itself by referring to itself (which is one and the same thing) is from the very beginning only the possibility and necessity of a *potential being* that consciousness contains in-itself. This potential structure only has the possibility of unfolding into actuality through developing synthetic relations with the object, through which it will gradually reveal this object as having been already analytically contained within consciousness itself all along from the very beginning. If not, then Hegel could have immediately “differentiated” self-consciousness from consciousness by means of semantic analysis at the very outset without even having to consider “the empirical journey” of consciousness developing into self-consciousness.

However, due to the fact that consciousness does not reveal from the very beginning this potential structure of self-consciousness and self-relatedness, there will inevitably be those who oppose viewing all consciousnesses as self-consciousness and who believe immediate consciousness is more reliably self-evident than “mediated” self-consciousness. Prior to Hegel, Spinoza was the representative of this tendency. Spinoza insisted: “[i]t is also evident that, for the certitude of truth, no further sign is necessary beyond the possession of a true idea: for, as I have shown, it is not necessary that we know that we know.”³⁰ In the modern era, Husserl’s “theory of intentionality” is the representative of this tendency. Husserl proposes in *Logical Investigations*: any state of consciousness that is already by definition *consciousness of something* cannot possibly also be *consciousness of this state* as such a state; consciousness

only becomes conscious of referring to itself by accident and becoming conscious of this also does not prove that self-reference is a property of consciousness in-itself.³¹ It would be convenient to add that this view is expressed in a mode similar to Spinoza's above. For this reason, Husserl insists that all consciousness is in principle anonymous and in order to draw it out from this anonymous state, it must be acted upon by a specific reflection, which is an act that is itself anonymous, and so on.³² Hegel indeed directs consciousness from being in-itself through reflection toward being for-itself, toward consciousness of itself: "self-consciousness is in fact the reflection out of the being of the sensuous and perceived world."³³ But the problem is Hegel's reflection arises from the essential structure that is intrinsic to consciousness ("returning to" considering itself), whereas what Husserl calls "reflection" is only contingently reflecting by accident of extrinsic circumstance, that is, reflection based on the so-called theory of "consciousness possessing itself through inner perception," which does not permit any "inversion." Clearly, the stuff Husserl is trying to underscore here is what Hegel conveniently places out of consideration, insisting it "lacks certainty," which is the "pre-scientific" stuff that possesses intentionality but not yet reflexivity (reflection), like meaning, lived experience, mood and so on, which Sartre calls "the pre-reflective cogito" and Martin Heidegger calls *Vorstruktur*; they are "forgotten" by Hegel as a concrete unspeakable wealth beneath both concept and language. In this regard, Husserl's discovery is of enormous significance, but even so, it still cannot be used to refute Hegel's standpoint of taking reflection as the essential structure of consciousness, because, as we have shown, what Husserl calls reflection and what Hegel calls reflection are two completely different things. Though I may not carry out "reflection" on consciousness in the Husserlian sense, it remains absolutely unexplainable outside of the Hegelian sense of intrinsic reflection why self-consciousness would necessarily develop from consciousness, why the unspeakable things beneath language necessarily have to be said and expressed, and why that which is concrete and richly filled necessarily strives to be universal (as any artistic production necessarily demands to be understood by people). Husserl later presents the theories of "the transcendental ego" and "intersubjectivity," which arise from the consideration of breaking through this very difficulty, but only insofar as he does not view self-consciousness (or intersubjective self-consciousness) itself as "inter-subject" consciousness, that is, a self's consciousness of "another" self, in other words, a consciousness's consciousness of a consciousness. Tracking down the essential structure intrinsic to consciousness as such, Husserl's late efforts are ultimately external settings of the contingent, which is to say divorced from what he himself calls "the inner perception" (*die innere Wahrnehmung*). In this sense, Hegel's reflection plays an irreplaceable function, demonstrating consciousness's own "intentionality" (i.e., referring to an object) not only as not contradicting its reflexivity, but moreover as proof of consciousness's reflexivity. Cramer argues that consciousness is only simultaneously conscious of itself when it is consciousness of an object as such.³⁴ For this reason,

Cramer insists the reflection on this reflexive structure of consciousness holds in Hegel extremely important methodological significance: consciousness differentiating from itself and referring to itself function as formal means in the method adopted by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Everything that becomes a theme for the phenomenology must exhibit this very structure, and the phenomenological reconstruction of what enters discussion only enjoys leeway of theoretical activity under condition of having this structure.³⁵ Even in the later chapters on “Spirit” and “Religion” this unvarying formal structure of consciousness is also the means by which shapes of consciousness unfold.³⁶

We can see from this analysis that Hegel’s doctrine of self-consciousness is posited by elevating the self-referring negation of and by itself (or self-determination), which in Kant was still only an active attribute of “the spontaneous ego,” from simple subjectivity to independent subject. Kant’s knowing subject (the self) is still an unknowable thing in-itself separated from its subjectivity (the synthetic power of apperception) and possessing this power of its apperception as its own attribute and predicate. Hegel then “inverts” this predicate into the subject. In this way, the curtain hiding the inner world is drawn and what emerges is but the inner world’s immediate intuition of the inner world, which is self-consciousness.³⁷ The general concept of this self-consciousness could be encapsulated in Hegel’s own words: “It is in confronting an other that the I is itself. At the same time, it reaches out over and beyond this other, which, for the I, is likewise only itself.”³⁸ This formulation of Hegel’s encompasses three moments:

(1) Self-consciousness itself. Even though self-consciousness rises up out of consciousness, it still treats consciousness as an essential moment of itself, namely “the object” moment (object consciousness). The object of self-consciousness is consciousness as such, and self-consciousness becomes conscious of there being a difference between this consciousness as self and that consciousness as object. However, self-consciousness transcends this difference as soon as it becomes conscious of it, because it also becomes conscious of itself as the unity of the two: it is both the consciousness that is conscious and the consciousness of which it is conscious; it is both self and object. This unity becomes actual through a processing by which it continually transcends and negates itself: “the object of sensuous-certainty and perception, which, however, is marked *for it* with the *character of the negative*,”³⁹ yet the object is by itself the negative of immediate consciousness as well, so “[s]elf-consciousness exhibits itself therein as the movement.”⁴⁰ By considering self-consciousness from this dynamic standpoint, it is no longer a motionless tautology like “I am I,” but is now pure striving as such; it has become “desire” in pursuit of that object which is the negative of itself, that is, “life.” This is the second moment of self-consciousness.

(2) Life. Self-consciousness is not in pursuit of a fixed target outside of itself but rather pursues its own life: for it to become that which has vitality, it must act and hunt. Hence, it must conquer all of those persistent, self-standing, differentiated things, dissolve them in the flow of time, consume them and use

them to sustain itself as one persistent living substance; but at the same time it also must turn itself into a fluid substance, “as such it is life as *living substance*.”⁴¹ That is to say, self-consciousness does not just strive in need of life, but is also life itself as the very process of striving to live, which upon reaching the object reverts back to itself. Consequently, an inversion occurs between it and the object for which it is striving: it “straightaway sublates *its opposition to the other through which it is for itself*.”⁴² Since self-consciousness is itself life, self-consciousness pursues life in pursuit of itself; since it is this very process of pursuing, it unfolds by itself as a life’s pursuit of another life, as a finite life striving for infinite life. As such, self-consciousness is a race.

(3) “Species” consciousness. “I” have become the relation of I with I, the universal of “I,” that is “we,” “the species”; the internal structure of self-consciousness already essentially contains in-itself relations that are by nature social, from which we can see so-called “intersubjectivity” is rooted inside of the “subjectivity” of self-consciousness and is not externally found purely “between” each subject. Because self-consciousness strives for itself as the object of life, it also strives for another living object to be itself, “*Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*.”⁴³ This is the “double reflection” or “doubling” structure of self-consciousness, which is both the negative of inorganic Nature’s objectness and also the negation of this negative’s particularity, such that it attains “this universal self-sufficient nature, in which the negation is as absolute.”⁴⁴ It has attained a new positive concept that is *spirit*.

The concept of *spirit* is thereby present and available for us. What will later come to be for consciousness will be the experience of what spirit is, this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*. Consciousness has its turning point in self-consciousness, as the concept of spirit, where, leaving behind the colorful semblance of the this-worldly sensuous, and leaving behind the empty night of the supersensible other-worldly beyond, it steps into the spiritual daylight of the present.⁴⁵

In his recent work *The Philosophical Reflection of History: Research on Phenomenology of Spirit* (Shuren 1988), Wang Shuren presents the *Phenomenology* by way of exploring the human condition in earlier ages before discussing “the mastery-servitude relationship.” He insists that what the Hegelian determination of the “three moments” in the concept of self-consciousness (self-consciousness itself, life and species) “builds up and discloses is basically the unknowing state of primitive human beings with lower intelligence who still could not truly differentiate themselves from the objective world.”⁴⁶ “In Hegel’s exposition, he seems to reveal the primitive condition of the very first human groups.”⁴⁷ He also combines modern anthropological

examinations of primitive “totem worship practices,” “the trading of surplus to meet needs,” barbaric wars and “the embryonic state of private property,” to gradually explain Hegel’s exposition. I argue, this method of “checking the seat assignment to verify the matching seat” unavoidably produces a far too concrete and overly stiff understanding of Hegel’s conceptual determination of self-consciousness, let alone the fact that Hegel did not necessarily believe at the time that a primitive “golden age” without slave labor and contentious struggles ever existed. His conception of social history begins with private property as the starting point. For instance, in *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* he even speaks of the “negro” peoples in unexplored African regions as existing in “slavery” as the “basic legal relationship in Africa.”⁴⁸ Seemingly non-existent in Hegel is any thought about “the interpersonal relation” at a stage of social development prior to “mastery and servitude,” but we may still draw from this a viewpoint of utmost importance for understanding the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is that Hegel’s doctrine of mastery and servitude cannot be restrictively considered under the scope of slavery societies in history and ought to be seen rather as a real level of consciousness within all human consciousnesses, including modern human consciousness, for it holds universal significance that transcends concrete historical ages. This is also a point that Wang Shuren fails to notice in *The Philosophical Reflection of History*. The main intention of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not to describe history but to describe the experience of consciousness and draw out “absolute knowing” from it. Of course, at the stage of “self-consciousness,” “spirit” is still nothing more than a concept emerging in subjective intuition, far removed from that spiritual life of actual society discussed later in the second volume of the *Phenomenology*. But this concept of subjective spirit must first be self-consciously recognized and the person must first recognize his essential sociality, all of which requires passing through a real historical process. At the same time, this is also the process through which the true concept of “freedom” takes shape.

The negative as freedom

Speaking of freedom, we could argue that it is generally seen by Hegel as a concept synonymous with the negative. We can truly understand freedom, but solely on the basis of this principle of negation or the negation of the negation. Freedom’s implications of activity and positivity are based on the implications of activity and positivity in negativity itself. The passive and abstract senses of freedom (as “unrestrained” or “willy-nilly”) come from precisely the passive and abstract understanding of negativity, which externally opposes freedom to necessity and makes the former seem like a liberation from the latter. Active freedom is thus not simply breaking free of a negative that is forced upon us from the outside (which is actually just repelling and resisting), but is instead negation of and by itself, the necessity of determining ourselves by ourselves. “To be sure, necessity as such is not yet freedom; but freedom

presupposes necessity and contains it sublated within itself.”⁴⁹ “This is the transfiguration of necessity into freedom, and ‘freedom’ now is not just the freedom of abstract negation, but concrete and positive freedom instead.”⁵⁰ Positive freedom is an independent “substance.” This substance posits: “that *independence* is the infinite *negative relation to self*,” “the independence, that is the repulsion of itself from itself into distinct independent [terms], [but] which, as this repulsion, is identical with itself.”⁵¹ Negative freedom, in contrast, is only

freedom of choice, as the capacity to determine oneself in this way or that, is certainly an essential moment of the will, which by its very concept is free. But it is not freedom itself at all; on the contrary, it is still only freedom in the formal sense. The will that is genuinely free, and contains freedom of choice sublated within itself, is conscious of its content as something steadfast in and for itself; and at the same time it knows the content to be utterly its own.⁵²

Freedom of choice in Hegel’s view is ultimately decided by external necessity, even though it prides itself on how free it is from the bondage of all necessity. True freedom thus has the same reflexive structure as that of self-consciousness, which is the ultimately necessary and affirmative structure of “self-negation of and by itself.” True freedom is the self-conscious regulation or negation (sublation) of “freedom of choice,” and for this very reason true freedom is the active subject who internalizes all external necessity into a moment of itself.

For the above reason, self-consciousness is already in-itself a free subject by virtue of itself being reflexive in structure. However, for self-consciousness to become distinctly conscious of this independence of freedom in-itself, it still needs to undergo a process, which, concretely speaking, means undergoing a social life of interrelation and interaction between one self-consciousness (one person) and another self-consciousness (another person). This is the course of shaping consciousness that Hegel describes in the two sections “the Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness” and “the Freedom of Self-Consciousness.”

As stated, self-consciousness already intrinsically contains the essence of “the species” in its Concept, but it is no easy matter for self-consciousness to enter the true life of the “species,” confirm its own species essence through the real relating of one human being with another, and thereby recognize its own freedom of self-consciousness. What it first runs up against is the contradiction of “double self-consciousnesses,” that is, self-consciousness discovering the existence of another self-consciousness and it externally standing in opposition. Here, self-consciousness, first of all, must project itself outward and make itself become something else; then it must retrieve itself and find itself among something else; but because this rediscovered self is found in and retrieved from an object, this self simultaneously sublates its own singular

individuality and becomes a universal self, whose essence both self and object have common shares, that is, universal self-consciousness (the I of We). It no longer negates the other opposite to it and holds firmly onto itself, "it likewise gives the other self-consciousness back to itself, and it thus sets the other free again."⁵³ In this universal self-consciousness, human beings enter a relation of interaction with other human beings: "Each sees *the other* do the same as *he* does; each himself does what he demands of the other and for that reason also does what he does *only* insofar as the other does the same." "But also inasmuch as it is just as much inseparably *the doing of one* as well as *the doing of the other*."⁵⁴ People see the other on the horizon of consciousness as an object that is external to themselves, but on the horizon of self-consciousness people see both themselves and the other, "I" and "you," as two extremes of one identical "middle term" that is self-consciousness, in the middle of which, "[t]hey recognize themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*."⁵⁵ True freedom is only won in the taking of this step.

However, this "mutually recognizing each other" is not so swiftly achieved, not over the course of an instant, but instead only actualizes by way of passage through a painful struggle, not only with the other but with oneself as well. In the two short sections on struggle against another self-consciousness and on mastery and servitude, Hegel details the painful and arduous passage through negation of and by itself, through which self-consciousnesses must pass for mutual recognition to come about between each other (and consequently for consciousness of one's own freedom to come about). While self-consciousness is firmly clinging to itself, it first adopts an attitude of abstract repulsion toward another self-consciousness: because self-consciousness is "life," this attitude of repulsion leads self-consciousness into a struggle of life and death, "[a]nd it is solely by staking one's life that freedom is proven to be the essence."⁵⁶ The culmination is, the original unity of independent self-consciousness bifurcates into two codependent yet mutually repelling sides, that is, "the master" and "the servant." The master embodies the pure abstraction of self-consciousness as such, which is the autonomous moment of agency in the unity of self-consciousness; the servant embodies in the same way a life of abstraction, that is, the passive moment of servility. The two sides have both lost independent self-consciousness through this bifurcation: precisely as the master is only partially recognized as abstract one-sided self-consciousness, his self-consciousness is no longer self-sufficient but is instead a consciousness that is dependent—because of its abstraction and partiality—on the servant who can only hand what is essential to himself over to the master for subsistence, on the servant who has not established complete self-consciousness. But Hegel insists that, as the moment of negation in the whole of self-consciousness, only the servile consciousness can convert from passive to active and reestablish completely independent self-consciousness. This species of self-consciousness, by way of undergoing the negation of negation, has freed itself from the particular narrowness of standing in opposition to another self-consciousness and has become universal, infinite self-consciousness, which is to

say consciousness of freedom. This turn is effectuated through the labor or work of the servant:

Work *cultivates and educates*. The negative relation to the object becomes the *form* of the object; it becomes something that endures because it is just for the laborer himself that the object has self-sufficiency. This *negative* mediating middle which in the work external to it now enters into the element of lasting. Thus, by those means, the working consciousness comes to an intuition of self-sufficient being *as its own self*.⁵⁷

As for the master, the object is immediately consumed, and due to not having met any resistance whatsoever, there is no way for him to verify his own powers in the object, whereas the servant in contrast conquers the object's natural self-sufficiency by way of altering the form of the natural thing, but he still preserves the object's independence in humanized form, making it the intuitive symbol of his own power. The servant does not himself immediately consume the product of his labor (for the product belongs to the master), but rather imprints upon it the mark of his own will and lets the product lastingly maintain independent being while he intuitively observes his own independence and creativity in it. For this reason, the servant's relationship with his object is one of mutual reflection and mutual corroboration. It is this very relation of humanizing between a human being and natural being, which lays the ground for a new model of human-to-human relation that is essentially freedom with universal and infinite scope.

As a result, the form, by being *posited as external*, becomes to him not something other than himself [...] Therefore, through this retrieval, he comes to acquire through himself a *mind of his own*, and he does this precisely in the work in which there had seemed to be only some *outsider's mind*.⁵⁸

In other words, he becomes conscious of his own freedom.

What we are observing is work, that is, the externalization of the servile self into the independent form of the object by virtue of the servant's own work of becoming-objective, which is the necessary pathway to freedom for consciousness. This profound thought of Hegel's is only strengthened via repetition in Marx later on, especially in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.⁵⁹ But Hegel assumes this process of becoming-free is only realizable through "mastery and servitude," whereas Marx progressively reveals the oppositional relationship of master and servant and the institutional birth of private property along with the confrontational division of classes as what cause the alienation of labor or the estrangement of work itself, which fully dispossesses human beings of the freedom that is essential to them. That said, it is still undeniable that Hegel expresses the essence of negativity inside of freedom itself through mastery and servitude, through the servant's trembling before

the master and fear in the face of death, and through the servant's exertion of force in work. A most common false notion is that freedom is a pleasant state of comfortable well-being and relaxation from constraints, that it is possible to attain freedom seemingly without any pressure to exert oneself or undergo even the slightest bit of technical or operational training. Hegel thus points out: this sort of "freedom" of consciousness is nothing but "a skill which, while it has dominance over some things, has dominance over neither the universal power nor the entire objective essence," because "then the negative essence will have remained an externality to himself, and his substance will not have been infected all the way through by it."⁶⁰ Therefore,

If consciousness engages in formative activity without that first, absolute fear, then it has a mind of its own which is only vanity, for its form, or its negativity, is not negativity *in itself*, and his formative activity thus cannot to himself give him the consciousness of himself as consciousness of the essence.⁶¹

The servant shivers inside when standing before such negatives alienating himself as the master's sword and shackles, but through working, he develops the consciousness that the shackles and sword are of his own making, that he could destroy these self-estranging negatives, "and posits *himself* as such a negative within the element of continuance."⁶² For this reason, the freedom of which he becomes conscious is not the freedom of moving about lackadaisically without social or external constraints (like the freedom championed by Zhuangzi in ancient China); it is not once again devolving back into the freedom of being empty and doing nothing (emptiness and effortless action), but is the freedom of negating that which is negative for oneself, the freedom of work and struggle, the freedom that wells up from pain and discontent, so unbearable that it summons the will to take hold of one's own destiny. We could also call it the freedom of striving for freedom.

However, as Marx points out: "The only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is *abstractly mental* labor."⁶³ Gadamer raises an objection to this, saying: "Hegel would never have dreamt for a moment that work is only the work of thought and that what is reasonable would be realized solely through thought."⁶⁴ This retort is completely superficial. The question is not whether or not aside from the work of thought there is also material labor, but rather whether or not he ultimately reduces material labor to the work of mind and thought. The answer is obviously yes; otherwise, Hegel would be a materialist. Gadamer's other retort to Marx is: what Hegel's dialectic of mastery and servitude describes is not the wage laborer but merely farmers and manual laborers in bondage, and what Marx's dialectic attempts to draw out is the liberation of the wage slave (the working class) from it, which, as a "critical approach," is "quite superficial."⁶⁵ This objection also falls apart, because even though Hegel attributes the origin of the master-servant bond to conquest and violent force (life-and-death struggle) in harmony with the ordinary bourgeois

view of history, this is not quite the same as the capital-labor relationship of employment (the “equal” relation); but a substantive understanding of this mastery-servitude relationship continually runs through the modern era into the relations of capitalism. Far from being merely a “structural similarity,” this instead grasps the general essence of the relationship between the governing class and the governed class in history. Accordingly, what Marx proposes, the liberation of the working class, is not the liberation of a specific class but instead the freeing of all classes, the historical sublation and conclusion of all mastery-servitude relationships. It then comes as no surprise how Marx could find the moment to trigger contemporary social revolution from Hegel’s dialectic of mastery and servitude. In Hegel’s view, human beings, through working, negate the objective matter of the object, but this is only consciousness negating its own “objectness,” while the object itself is reduced to the subjective form that consciousness forces upon it. Consciousness externalizes, becoming the object’s form, so as to overcome the subjectivity of itself, while consciousness also returns to itself from the object’s form to overcome its own abstractness, all of which happens in human consciousness and human thought. “In contrast, pressed back into itself and as the form of the culturally shaped thing, consciousness becomes in formative activity an object to itself.”⁶⁶ So, matter as the object of work “is no other substance but consciousness itself.”⁶⁷ In this way, Hegel found it possible to leave out of his consideration the sensuousness (objectness) of living activity when dealing with the freedom that is won through working, and only focus instead on freedom at the level of human consciousness.

For the reasons just mentioned, when the servile consciousness reaches the stage of freedom of consciousness, for Hegel, this freedom of consciousness is first expressed by means of internally splitting apart. That is, my freedom is only embodied in my own thought and consciousness, whereas the object does not belong to me but is outside of me. However, now that my consciousness is free, I may now hold the object in contempt; I may obliterate the object in thought; I may turn the object into my abstract concept and consequently remain unmoved by the object in any circumstance. This is “Stoicism.” When Xue Hua deals with freedom of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his book *Developing Freedom of Consciousness* (Xue 1983) *ziyou yishi de fazhan* 自由意识的发展, he goes so far as to leave out all of the parts about Stoicism, skepticism and unhappy consciousness, which Hegel distinctly marks as freedom of self-consciousness, insisting “they all come into being on the foundation of the master-servant relationship and struggle for freedom within the master-servant relation.”⁶⁸ It would seem these shapes of consciousness do not deserve any detail in his treatment as long as he clarifies the master-servant relationship. This is most disappointing. In fact, this is precisely where Hegel investigates the formative process of the true conception of freedom beyond the master and servant consciousnesses. In our view, this splitting apart of freedom and object is, factually speaking, accomplished by the institutional forces of private property: even in creative

work, the servant's object does not belong to the servant himself but belongs to a being who is alien and hostile to him (i.e., the master).⁶⁹ In Hegel, this progression, which is articulated as that of self-consciousness, that is, that freedom can first reach consciousness only in thought, is precisely Stoicism's principle of freedom: "Consciousness is the thinking essence and something only has essentiality for consciousness, or is true and good for it, insofar as consciousness conducts itself therein as a thinking being."⁷⁰ Strictly speaking, Hegel's retelling here only fits with the Stoicism of the late Roman Empire like the doctrines of emperor Marcus Aurelius and the slave philosophers Epictetus and Seneca, not the early Stoicism inclined toward materialism, because the latter fully believed that sensuous perception is produced by real objects that force themselves upon the intellect and make it compliant.⁷¹ But it was, in contrast, only late Stoicism that recognized the unreal nature of the hierarchy in identity between master and servant, because of holding that thought transcends all distinctions of external objects (even the distinction of the noblest emperor and basest slave):

Its doing consists in neither being the master who has his truth in the servant nor in being the servant who has his truth in the will of the master and in serving him. Rather, it consists in being free within all the dependencies of his singular existence, whether on the throne or in fetters, and in maintaining the lifelessness which consistently *withdraws* from the movement of existence, *withdraws* from actual doing as well as from suffering, and *withdraws* into the simple essentiality of thought.⁷²

Hegel believes this first freedom of self-consciousness is only the attainment of an abstract essence through asceticism and the austere belief in abandoning all contents of life, which is therefore only a formal abstract freedom of negative passivity that merely indicates the firm willpower to bear all kinds of corporeal and emotional pain without being mentally affected or disturbed by it; it one-sidedly extracts from servile labor the power of the self to tolerate what is negative, considering it to be the feature of a pure consciousness that divorces cleanly from the diversity of external beings, and consequently, fails to completely negate external beings, and instead, merely flees from them.

After self-consciousness obtains this standpoint of abstract freedom, it turns back outward to negate things external, which elevates it to skepticism's level of self-consciousness. Skepticism no longer austere bears the outer world by fleeing back inside of the mind, but rather, in a subjective manner, arbitrarily cancels the truth of the essentiality of all things certain; this abstract negation deviates from that fixed and unchanging basepoint of Stoicism, and instead invests in proving anywhere and everywhere the unreality of all stably existing things. However, precisely for this reason, each time skepticism disproves a concrete thing, it bases itself on another no less contingent, unreal thing; it therefore cannot stop at anything and becomes an absolute dialectical unrest: "this consciousness, instead of being a self-equal consciousness,

is in fact therein only an utterly contingent disarray, the vertigo of a perpetually self-creating disorder.”⁷³ But the agitation of this perpetual unrest itself springs from that self-consciousness of abstract identity, because self-consciousness wishes to prove its own freedom and get a concrete experience of freedom by way of negating everything. Simply carrying on in this way, freedom of self-consciousness slips into self-contradiction: it both wants to negate everything and behold each thing as relative and contingent, so as to prove its own freedom, but the ground upon which it carries out the negation, the life it views as worthwhile, is no less relative and contingent and is even the life of complete animality (rumor has it that the representative of skepticism, Pyrrho, urged people when facing the threat of dying at sea to be as unperturbed as a pig on the boat going through mouthfuls of food). Thus, self-consciousness doubles and becomes dual here: on one side, it is abstract consciousness of freedom, which defuses all impulses and belittles the reality of worldly life; the other side is unconscious instinctual impulse and perpetually restless perturbation of the inner mind. Distinct consciousness of this dual opposition is the “unhappy consciousness” (*das unglückliche Bewusstsein*).

In the short section on unhappy consciousness, Hegel mainly draws on the development of Christian consciousness to explain a higher level in the conscious development of human freedom. In the process of striving for freedom, the human being becomes trapped in a conflict of spirit and flesh, in which consciousness of bodily life falls under consciousness of change and is seen as inessential; on the other side, the soul falls under “unchangeable consciousness” and is seen as essential and identical with God. This “battle of hostile opponents” waged within one and the same consciousness fills it to the brim with feelings of pain and original sin, because the human being is always trying to transcend the singular individuality of his own bodily life and raise consciousness up to that of the unchangeable, God, but is forever failing to break free of singular individuality. So the human being gradually recognizes, individuality is inside of the unchanging essence, or the unchanging essence is inside of individuality. This consciousness is the individual form emerging within the unchanging essence; it is revelation via incarnation or Christ descending on the human world. Jesus Christ is both an individual living person and one universal spirit, who combines the two sides together into himself. This sparks in people a hope and desire to reach the unity of reality and self-consciousness by emulating Christ, which is the effort to unify the dual opposition of transcendent spirit and immanent flesh. Such efforts pass through three stages:

(1) Pure consciousness, that is, Christian consciousness from the early Christian patriarchs onward before the renaissance. People assume it is possible to suddenly realize their unity with God with the purity of their own thoughts and with the sincerity of their own silent prayers. But it forever remains impossible to truly grasp God this way, because this would be to treat God as an individual object with whom direct dialogue is possible, even

though it only expresses the mood of the one who is praying: "its thinking remains that of the shapeless roar of the pealing of bells, or that of a warm, all-suffusing vapor, or that of a musical thinking."⁷⁴ The failure of the eastward Crusades (to find Christ's "tomb") demonstrated the impossibility of human activity directly possessing the holy essence, so such activities began to appear as independent actualities, which ushered in the second stage:

(2) The singular individual actuality of the human being is found in work and desire and modalities of pleasure, all which are extrinsically interconnected with God and spiritual salvation. This is the religious spirit of the renaissance. Here, consciousness recognizes its own finitude and so turns back to "self-feeling, or as the actual existing for itself."⁷⁵ Consciousness begins absorbing itself in pleasure and creation, but not without consciousness of the fact that pleasure and creation are nothing more than gifts of God's grace, the grace of that "unchanging essence." One strives not after the transcendent infinity of God who is "absolute and omnipotent," but only after maintaining the unity of singular individuality and God through feelings of gratefulness to God. But this unity again falls apart in actuality: when one enjoys pleasure, one is absolutely not thinking of God, and after the enjoyment of pleasure, when one is feeling thankful to God, one also completely negates and forgets the very fact of this pleasure arising from one's own free creation. But at bottom one truly experiences the independence and freedom of oneself as a singular individual. Even one's gratefulness to God is an independent act of one's own unique being, which ushers in the third stage:

(3) Self-consciousness attains reason. This is the actualization of consciousness's course of development ever since the religious reformation. Now that self-consciousness recognizes its own independence, it returns back into itself and acts upon itself as such, which is self-consciously negative for itself. The Puritans advocating asceticism saw action and pleasure as illusory and false; they saw singular individual actuality as an animalistic activity, and so treated it as "an enemy." But because this attitude always slips into the mire with the enemy, and is always polluted by the enemy, it simultaneously opposes what it considers base and lowly in the enemy's actions for dragging itself down to the lowliest level (oppose eating, oppose drinking, ascetic practice), "[w]hat we see here is only a personality limited to itself and its own petty acts; we see a brooding personality, as unhappy as it is impoverished."⁷⁶ Now that consciousness negates and dismisses as impure and unclean the entirety of its own personality and conduct, its merging with God depends solely on a third, that is, the church congregation or clergyman; consciousness hands over its own will, freedom and thought to such a "mediator," consciousness obeys his directions and follows his exhortations, while simultaneously recognizing that itself does not understand the true sense of these advisements, "carrying out a task it does not understand, it deprives itself in truth and completely of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of actuality as its *being-for-itself*."⁷⁷ Visibly, it seems here, we can still see Hegel's earlier criticism of the Christian religion's authoritativeness and evidentiary concreteness, but Hegel

points out at the same time, this “true self-sacrifice” of consciousness removes the deceptiveness that had been there in the prior stage, that of attributing the independent will that consciousness as such already owns to God’s grace coming from the outside by way of feeling thankful to God. Here, inversely,

on the one hand, surrendering one’s own will is only negative according to *its concept*, or *in itself*, but at the same time it is positive, specifically, it is the positing of the will as an *other*, and, especially, it is the positing of the will as universal, not as the will of a singular individual.⁷⁸

The human will and the divine will attain identity (even through the mediation of the church) and one begins to truly believe: “to put it according to the concept, a doing is only a *doing* at all as the doing of a singular individual.”⁷⁹ When Protestantism saw this act of personal faith as expression of God’s will, it effectively imparted the free will inside human beings with positive and lawful form; it made self-consciousness rise from the singular individuality of the particular human being to the universal self-consciousness of omnipresent God, initiating the advance into the conscious horizon of “reason” and laying the basis for sublating and eliminating the unhappy consciousness of Christianity. However, since the singular individuality of human beings and the universality of God are still separated by a church serving as mediator, the spell of unhappy consciousness, which comes with the separation of this immanent world from the other world beyond, still remains ultimately unbroken, at least on the surface. Even so, reason, which is true freedom of self-consciousness and conscious of its own activity, had already been growing into being during this final stage of unhappy consciousness. “Consciousness has taken hold of the thought that singular *individual* consciousness *in itself* is absolute essence, and in that thought, consciousness again takes an inward turn.”⁸⁰ This is the true positing of the modern spirit of reason.

The spirit of reason is true freedom of consciousness, which, in turn, is also the starting point for the advance toward Hegel’s absolute spirit. Its positing is the positing of that end of absolute knowing toward which absolute spirit develops freedom. Consciousness ultimately discovers through negation of and by itself over long periods of painful striving and unhappiness that this negation of and by itself had been the absolute essence all along, the essence of God. Consciousness finally discovers the freedom it had been striving for all along is but this very striving or the negation of itself by itself.

Until now it had occupied itself only with its self-sufficiency and its freedom in order to save and preserve itself for itself at the cost of the *world* or its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its own essence.⁸¹

Now, this negative bearing as such becomes an affirmation. Consciousness believes the negative of itself is not merely subjective, but is and has always

been the negative journey of objective reality as such, so it freely turns to the actual world and “feels interested” in the positive side and perpetual existence of the world; it wishes to retrieve discoveries of certainty and truth from the vanishing flux of the objective world. Reason is but this bearing of subjectivity in dealings with the objective world.

The negative as reason and its alienation

In truth, Hegel’s thought of “subjectivity” is completed at the stage of “reason.” At the stage of self-consciousness, subjectivity is still internal and outwardly unexpressed. At the stage of consciousness of freedom, subjectivity forcefully tries to express itself, but is always slipping into a binary division without any way of reverting back to the unitary self-reference that the subject needs, so unhappiness, unbearable happiness accompanies the subject day and night. By the stage of reason, consciousness has found firm belief that its truth is universally embodied in the external objects of objective reality. Thus, consciousness is no longer unhappy but has rather calmed down, and with a cool head, objectively considers the outer world that it faces, because “[r]eason is the certainty which consciousness has of being all reality.”⁸² Now the problem is no longer whether this world and the world beyond unify or whether consciousness and reality unify, but is rather: how do they unify?

Hegel argues that the starting point of this objective and calm attitude of consideration can only be idealism because consciousness can only attain such a calmness of inner mind when it firmly believes itself to be all of reality or all reality to be consciousness. But he also argues, this is only a starting point and consciousness cannot always cling to this or treat itself as an empty container that holds all of reality, but must temporarily “forget” this “mine-ness” and observe reason as something immediately present. Such an immediately present object is “the category.” Reason is both the theoretical attitude and objectively calm bearing of examining the objective object and at the same time this very object that it is examining, which is the category. The so-called category is not the object’s sensuous representation but the object’s essentiality and universality, the object’s specified genus or universal, while sensuous things “here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas.”⁸³ The object is in this sense identical with reason doing the consideration of the object. Because of this, “the category is this: Self-consciousness and being are the same essence.”⁸⁴ Reason is the following treatment of the object: trying to understand sensuous disorder as an orderly category, that is, understanding sensuous disorder as actually being rational by itself.

Hegel’s understanding of the activity of the rational subject is obviously an “inverted” understanding, which treats reason—the subjective reflection of objective law—as objective law itself. We can see from here a long-developing inversion throughout the history of Western philosophy, that is, the inversion expressed by the spirit of *logos* in ancient Greece. Hegel considers “reason itself” (in the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology*) to indeed be reason in

the sense of *logos*. Based on this analysis, we can perhaps unravel a perpetually baffling riddle, namely that about the table of contents in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to how Hegel conceives it overall, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* includes the three main parts of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason. Here, "reason" ought to be reason in the sense of *logos*; it is a positivity whose positing is a result of passing through the negation of the negative by agency of consciousness and self-consciousness; after it sublates the impulse of negativity inside of itself, after it sublates the impulse of *nous* inside of itself, it becomes a subjective "category" which is the identity of the subjective and objective that firmly believes in its own possession of objectivity. However, when reason in this sense investigates the world of objects with the cool and calm attitude of objective observation, reason gets wrapped up further and further with its object at each progressive step. The *logos* of reason, while unfolding itself, reveals once again the essence of the spirit of *nous* contained inside of itself, and reason sees in the object more than just the objectively necessary law, but the active "spirit" of freedom as well. Reason can no longer find rest in the cool and calm attitude of objective observation. Reason can only succeed in grasping the spirit of these, return once again to the *logos* of reason and arrive at spirit's "conceptual understanding" of itself by relying completely on the impulse of *nous* (aside from *logos*) hiding inside of itself and by actively intervening and investing itself in the realm of spirit. Clearly, on one hand Hegel uniformly addresses "reason" in the next few chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but on the other hand he also singles out one chapter from them to first deal with "reason by itself," because in the narrow sense "reason by itself" is mainly *logos*, whereas in the broader sense reason includes the underlying impulse of *nous* or "spirit" (of course, inversely, one could say, the broader sense of "spirit" also contains "reason"). For this reason, Werner Marx points out that Hegel's concept of spirit, despite initially having religious affiliation, has deep roots in the philosophical tradition of *logos*.⁸⁵ He is only half right on this point, failing to see the other half of Hegel's *Geist*, which aside from literally meaning the Christian "holy spirit," also has a much deeper source of thought that can be traced back to the *nous* of ancient Greece. Of course, reason and *Geist* are two concepts with nearly equivalent senses in Hegel, but *Geist* more strongly highlights the self-moving activity of freedom, that of living substance and *nous*, while "reason" underscores the certainty of logic, that of universal essence and *logos*; *Geist* inclines to the side of content and negativity, whereas reason inclines to the side of form and positivity. These two sides compose an indivisible unity, but at different stages of development they present different focuses and inclinations. It would be convenient to mention here that some in the Soviet Union have already recognized this double sense of "reason" in Hegel's concept.⁸⁶

Reason by itself in the sense of *logos* is expressed most directly and clearly in the part "Observing Reason." This part covers all the scientific methods employed by Hegel's time (the natural sciences and the sciences of thought,

namely logic and psychology, along with human sciences like physiognomy and phrenology), and in particular, he analyzes the variety of ways of considering the organism and the human being. Its main purpose is to point out the limitations of “observing reason,” that is, reason’s all-around attempt to embody the attitude of a detached observer, to observe the thing without intervening in the thing itself, but this becomes “observation released from the concept” or reason “grasped irrationally.”⁸⁷

The unhappy self-consciousness emptied itself of its self-sufficiency and agonizingly rendered its *being-for-itself* into a thing. As a result, it returned from self-consciousness into consciousness, i.e., into that consciousness for which the object is a *being*, a *thing*. —However, this, the thing, is self-consciousness. The thing is thus the unity of the I and of being; it is the *category*. While the object for consciousness is determined in that way, *consciousness has reason*.⁸⁸

Observing reason separates the I and being; it still knows not what this reason in its possession is, but when it observes self-consciousness as such, it derives the “infinite judgment” that “spirit (reason, the self) *is* (a *thing*)”:

The moment of that infinite judgment is the transition from *immediacy* into mediation, or *negativity*. The object that is present is thus determined as a negative object, whereas consciousness is determined as *self-consciousness* with regard to the object. That is, the category, which, in observing, has traversed the form of *being*, is now posited in the form of being-for-itself. Consciousness no longer wants to *find* itself *immediately*. Rather, it wishes to engender itself by its own activity.⁸⁹

This is the entry into reason’s second mode of activity, that is, from knowledge (observation) into practice. Hegel describes this stage as “the actualization of rational self-consciousness through itself.”

Whereas observing reason uncovers negativity in the object that is present, practical reason pushes the negation of and by itself toward the alienation of self-consciousness in actual social life. Generally speaking, alienation in Hegel is one form of self-negation, or rather, alienation is the advanced form of self-negation, because we can only speak of subjectivity alienating itself by itself (alienation is self-alienation) after self-negation brings subjectivity to completion through a series of developments. Of course, this self-negating negation is already by itself subjectivity, but distinctly posited subjectivity only exists at the stage of freedom of self-consciousness, which is that of the self-sufficient human being who has reason. A human being must first have reason and consciousness of freedom to create her own object for her to have the possibility of discovering this object as no longer belonging to herself, and discover it instead as having turned against her, as an object external to herself, as standing over against her and opposing her. This condition must

first be met for a human being to feel the “estrangement” and “alienation” of her own object from herself, to feel it turning against her as a restriction upon her own freedom. The pain and unhappiness that accompany alienation and estrangement express how the self-conscious negation of and by itself feels, but not every negation of and by itself is alienation. The only rational self-consciousness whose negation of itself and by itself is alienating is distinctly conscious of its own universality. Rampant abuse and overuse of the word “alienation” became fashionable for a stretch of time in Chinese academic circles, leading to no shortage of misunderstandings, among which the main ones are:

- (1) Considering alienation to be the general relationship of human beings to “alien things” and “strange things”: whatever is unknown, unfamiliar and strange to human beings along with whatever happens to frighten human beings is declared “alienating,” like those who consider nature in the eyes of primitive peoples to be an alien object and their relationship with this alien object as one of alienation;
- (2) Considering alienation to be the ideal’s contradictory relationship with the actual: whatever “ought to be” the case but in actuality cannot be the case is called an “alienating phenomenon,” for instance, when we say leaders ought to be public servants of the people, but in actuality some act as the people’s masters;
- (3) A mental affect considered subjectively repressive and constraining: all circumstances causing dissonance in the affective mind as well as dissatisfying and upsetting arrangements that are impossible to escape are deemed alienating phenomena;
- (4) Synonym for objectively unreasonable or illogical.

From these four points of view, what Marx calls “sublating alienation” is fundamentally impossible, because such phenomena will always be impossible to eliminate. These misunderstandings all fail to see that what is alienating must first be the product of human beings’ free will and human subjectivity for it to be repressive to the human will. Alienation presupposes the self-sufficiency of the human subject. If Nature is not the product of human making; if leaders are not freely elected representatives; if the subjectively repressive is not rooted in one’s own choosing; and if the objectively unreasonable does not arise from reason’s own logic, then none of it can count as “alienation,” no matter how strange and dissatisfying they make human beings feel and how incomprehensible they are. Of course, as people have pointed out, alienation in Marx is different from alienation in Hegel. In Marx, human activity originates from the externalization and objectification of its essential powers and nothing can cancel this out, whereas alienation, that is, the hostility and estrangement of human productions to and from human beings, will necessarily be sublated, because alienation is the product of certain historical conditions, namely the institutional conditions of private property. Hegel,

on the other hand, speaks equivocally of alienation, externalization and objectification as all one subject matter, because in his eyes private property is eternal. Human beings' sense of alienation effectively already emerges in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Stoicism, skepticism and unhappy consciousness, but genuine consciousness of alienation only happens to take place for the first time in the section on practical reason, because even though in the former case consciousness senses the existence of contradictions that are for itself irresolvable, consciousness still believes here that such contradictions come from external oppositions, whereas contradictions in the latter case are engendered by the active movement of freedom that puts the mind into the actual:

As a result, the individual in establishing his own order no longer finds it to be his own. Hence, through the actualization of his law, he does not produce his law. However, while both in itself the order is his own, but is, for him, alien, what he authors is only that of his own entanglement in the actual order, indeed, he is entangled in an order which is not only alien to him but which is also a hostile dominance.⁹⁰

At this point, "individuality becomes an object to itself as a universal, but an object in which consciousness does not recognize itself," but now that consciousness has attained reason, it no longer slips into despair and anguish upon beholding this object as a "dead actuality" and instead firmly believes in this object as aligning with "the law of all hearts"; "[t]his consciousness learns from experience that actuality is a living order, and in fact at the same time learns this just as a result of actualizing the law of its own heart."⁹¹ Yet, were consciousness to have entered this actuality holding this very belief in mind, were there someone wishing to rectify this world in the name of reason or "virtuous conduct," he would get the inverted sense that everything is insanity, because any institutional order that is drawn up by those who have reason in alignment with what is rational becomes an irrational and unrecognizable violation of what is common sense for all of humanity; this someone would be thrown overboard and cast aside by the course of the world as it is. The individual would no longer even have the ability to console himself with the arrogant self-aggrandizement of "sacrificing the individual for the good," whose only virtue, as nothing more than grossly inflated words, is to "elevate the heart and leave reason empty."⁹² A singular human being can only submit to the progression of the world; he must abandon that emptied reason of his; he must disown that moral criticism so divorced from actuality and elevated so high away from the progression of the world, and instead advance the course of the world further into actual struggles, into those everyday actions of selfish people looking out for themselves, because the course of the world is made up of precisely these self-centered actions of individuals looking to benefit themselves. He must believe virtuous ends are realized by vile means, but actions that arise from selfish interest also contain reason within them

and beneath such actions lives the actual “category.” Thus, reason, self-consciousness now “has the pure category itself for its object.”⁹³ Consciousness cannot force moral valuations onto actuality from outside of it, but must discover the rational category within the perverted mess that the actual is. Hence, consciousness now finds the individuality of each and every human being (no matter how “deficient” it is) to be the only thing that grounds actual life and holds self-consciousness to be in-itself the objective category. This leads to “the discovery of humanity” in the renaissance.

This species of reason, departing instead from singular individuality, faces what is alienating it from the very beginning. When each person abandons every moral ideal and external purpose and acts instead in a self-centered manner out of her own instincts, gifts and interests alone, she throws herself into “the spiritual kingdom of animals.” Here, everyone wrongly assumes themselves to be sincerely proceeding from their own nature, but fall prey to mutual deception, whether the intention to do so is present or not, because the product of their doings, their “works,” enter the social fabric once they have been created, and consequently, others value it with other eyes. Such valuations are perhaps totally different from what the author initially intended, but they are the result of the work being influenced by entering the social fabric. The singular individual’s very first “sincere intention,” when compared with such a result, should rather be called “self-deception.” Therefore, this “honest consciousness” (if resolutely upheld), becomes “mutual deception”; it becomes self-deception and disingenuously doing good, but when consciousness gives up on this standpoint of claiming to be ethical and honest, and looks at “the crux of the matter” (*die Sache selbst*) with open eyes, it attains “law-giving reason.” That is, it tries to posit one universal principle with which to evaluate all human deeds and works. But consciousness cannot disconnect from the crux of the matter to legislate. Instead, consciousness must begin with that unity made up of everyone; it must begin with the true *crux of the matter*, which is “the ethical substance.” The laws of the ethical substance are for law-giving reason “immediately given recognition. Their origin and legitimacy cannot be questioned and something other than them cannot be sought.”⁹⁴ It goes without saying that the ethical substance alone grounds law-giving reason, because it is simply this rational self-consciousness itself. Every thought setting out to be law-giving for actuality in effect already presupposes the ethical relationships of this very actuality, because of which there is no absolute and universally applicable law; every seemingly “impartial” and unopposable law that is established represents the interests of a certain ethical substance and could be overturned for evading the ground of said ethical substance. So, law-giving reason merely checks for the consistency of laws with respect to formal logic under specific ethical presuppositions. In other words, law-giving reason is the reason that “tests laws,” even though such laws are merely empty forms, because such testing is always premised by an untested presupposition (“As a determinate law, the law has a contingent

content”).⁹⁵ Referring to this untested condition, Charles Tyler states, “[Kant] was raked over the coals more than once by Hegel for it.”⁹⁶ Hegel cites an example, arguing that private property itself is not posited by law, but is instead the ground of laws, any testing of which can only leave private property itself unquestioned while questioning the logicity of laws founded upon it. But what is private property? In Hegel’s view, private property is nothing more than human self-consciousness of being in property relations. In other words, it is the ethical consciousness of people with respect to the property relations in which they live. Consciousness tests the limits of the law, where it becomes conscious of the law’s truth existing in the ethical consciousness of actual human beings and the ethical actuality thereby constituted. Thus, consciousness sublates itself and turns back to examining that very ground of itself.

However, this turning back to reconsider only happens for singular individuals (the philosopher, historian, legal theorist). For the average person (common people, people in everyday life), entering the ethical world is only a “straightaway movement of self-consciousness.” Those who have reason find themselves with others who similarly have reason in an ethical relationship of mutual dependence. For the singular individual, “[i]n the abstraction of *universality*, this ethical *substance* is only the law *as it has been thought*.”⁹⁷ For the average person, this ethical substance is “equally as much immediate actual *self-consciousness*, or it is an *ethos*.”⁹⁸ Because of this, practical reason’s consideration of social life is but the “retroactive movement of self-consciousness,” that is, the moral appraisal of actual life *ex post facto*, which ultimately situates itself outside of the objective actuality of ethical life while viewing it as an accident of “good fortune.” Moreover, when practical reason intervenes in the practical activity of ethical life, for the very same reason it sees its own controlling, creating and changing of social actuality to be some sort of good fortune (like a talent or rare gift belonging to a singular individual). Practical reason does not know (or has entirely forgotten) that this “good fortune” is actually nothing but the product of everyday self-conscious doing by common people, and consequently, what for a singular individual is a contingent fact accomplished accidentally is actually something that necessarily takes on in the life of a people according to the rational category of self-consciousness.

Hegel dives from here deeper into the essential structure inside of the ethical substance that makes reason acquire actuality, which is labor:

The individual’s labor for his needs is a satisfaction of the needs of others as much as it is of his own needs, and the satisfaction of his own needs is something he attains only through the labor of others. Just as the singular individual in his singular labor already without awareness performs a universal labor, he in turn also achieves the universal as his consciously known object. The whole becomes, as the whole, his own work, for which he sacrifices himself and through which he gets himself back.⁹⁹

The budding of historical materialism shown here in Hegel's thought is most stimulating for the mind. Marx will later analyze in a more specific manner the elements of this externalization that is work and its "reflexive" structure in *Comments on James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*:

Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. 1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality, its specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's* essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man's* essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realized* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal nature*.¹⁰⁰

Thus, our productions are likewise for us mirrors reflecting our essence. Marx differs from Hegel here, for after Marx examines the productive work of "man" in general, he also considers the "alienation" of this productive work and what historically conditions it, pointing out that "presupposing private property [...]," "[m]y work *is not* my life [...]," "[m]y individuality is alienated to such a degree that this *activity* is instead *hateful* to me, a *torment*, and rather a *semblance* of an activity."¹⁰¹ Inversely, Hegel sees private property and alienated labor itself as human beings' rightful and proper ethical actuality, or rather, he considers alienated labor (as capitalism's employment of labor) to be the character of human labor in general, "as man's essence in the act of proving itself: he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labor."¹⁰² Zhang Shiyong points out in his book *On Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit* (*lun heigeer de jingshen zhexue* 论黑格尔的精神哲学), that Hegel did speak of the negative side of labor. As recordings of Hegel's 1824–1825 lectures via K.G. von Griesheim's notes clearly show, Hegel says that indifference is growing in labor as passion is disappearing; that workers are dependent in character as a result of the factories blunting the spirit of their work; that workers are becoming wholly devoid of autonomy as they are only partially developing one side; that as the division of labor expands, the further spirit disappears from work; that as work is becoming more mechanical, the more

it is degrading the human being. There are also similar statements to be found in the Jena lectures on real philosophy, for which reason Zhang Shiyang insists: "Marx argues that Hegel only saw the positive side but not the negative side of labor, which is obviously because he could not see these materials of Hegel's [lectures] at the time."¹⁰³ However, I think that even if Marx had not seen these materials, he was always very familiar with the doctrines of Friedrich von Schiller, Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau about the alienation of man caused by the division of labor. Wouldn't he then just assume Hegel to be worse on this issue than even these forerunners? The answer is obviously no. Marx's argument that Hegel did not see the negative side of labor ought to mean Hegel ultimately saw these negative sides of labor as having positive significance in the end, because they were ultimately beneficial to bourgeois civil society, to the Prussian state and to Hegel's philosophy. Consequently, their negativity had already been sublated and canceled out by spirit and consciousness. Even though Marx also sees the evolutionary role of the alienation of labor in history, he still believes that the alienation of labor along with its benefactors, namely civil society, the police state and Hegelian philosophy, ought to be sublated in the end. Thus, for Marx the alienation of labor ought to be seen as the negative side of labor that still must be overcome in actuality. The very same fact of alienation looks completely different through a lens that is colored by alienation and from a standpoint that is for thoroughly sublating alienation. Hegel does not see the negative, inhuman effects of the alienation of labor simply as a result of looking at labor and all of actual life with alienated eyes, because he sets aside the sensuous aspect and human nature of work at the very outset by reducing it to the philosopher's abstract self-consciousness. Thus, like the political economists of his time, he "does not consider [the worker] when he is not working, as a human being."¹⁰⁴ Work in his mind is not the concrete, sensuous and actual motion of life, but merely "abstract" labor "in general"; nor is a human being in his mind a human being engaging in sensuous activity, but is rather a being who is alienated from this activity, that is, abstract self-consciousness. But ultimately, when Hegel treats labor as the processual relinquishing and alienating of self-consciousness, he does indeed express, however in alienated form, the active essence of a human being, which is to negate itself by itself. He meanwhile sees that the progressive course of objective history, which for universal self-consciousness and for the common consciousness or spirit of a people is a "straightaway movement," is for the individual person's consciousness a history of inversion and alienation, a "retrograde movement" of moral decay.

We can already see from the previous analysis that in Hegel, reason is intrinsically forced into motion and development by the negation of and by itself within each field where reason takes place from scientific knowledge, ethics and morality to civil society, political economy and life. This negation of and by itself may perhaps appear from moral, motionless and unchanging eyes as irrational, evil, inhumane or "bad," as it is full of the blood and tears of actual life; as it is filled with the pain and guilt, the greed and unfairness,

the violence and deception of what actually lives, reason still quietly opens up paths for itself in all of these alienating forms of itself, while steadily and unwaveringly sublating the alienation of itself. Hegel mainly illustrates in the second volume of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that alienation is neither just the subjective form of alienation that is presented to the individual person's eyes nor merely the "estrangement" and "estranging" that is subjectively felt by the singular individual; substantively speaking, alienation is but the objective law of the ethical world itself; it is the ethical substance "reasonably" developing with each progressive step into the opposite of itself and it is thereby turning itself into the object of sublation. When self-consciousness first (through work) externalizes and actualizes as objective ethical life, from our perspective (of doing phenomenology) this was already an alienation, but self-conscious human beings and participant members of ethical substance were not aware of this at the time. Each and every one of them considers this universal ethical principle ("the human law and the divine law") to be the essence of what they are and even treat it as their own natural feeling and instinct ("man and woman," "family"). This continues until "the state of legality" is born, until the state and government are established through the contract, only to turn back against every free citizen as powerful forces overriding them, at which point this human essence of alienation that is now becoming-objective is finally recognized. But by this time, the ethical essence founded on the natural relationship of the blood bond has already died off. Hegel's portrayal here obviously takes as a template Greek society and its transition to the legal society of imperial Rome. In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels analyzes this process from the standpoint of historical materialism. Self-consciousness (human being) in actuality has entered "spirit alienated from itself," a period of "cultural formation."

Of course, since Hegel understands the underlying substance of the world to be reason and the logical category (the concept), and understands it to be the abstracted and alienated form of the actual world, what he understands as "sublating alienation" allows alienation to remain as nothing less than religion recovered as "absolute knowing." Spirit and *nous* as the self-contradictory subject of the negation of and by itself finally sublates all of the contradictions making up itself through the logical Idea, Concept or *logos* that is now absolutely positive; it becomes God and the substance of reason. However, through this outer shell of idealism and mysticism we can still see that Hegel indeed grasps or speculatively reaches the true essence of the matter, that is, when he treats the dialectic of the negative as reason's weapon for dissecting all aspects of actual human life, when he tries to reveal with it the inner regularity of all historical movement in general. Marx points out:

Inasmuch as [the *Phenomenology*] keeps steadily in view man's *estrangement*, even though man appears only in the shape of mind, there lie concealed in it *all* the elements of criticism, already *prepared* and *elaborated* in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint.

The “Unhappy Consciousness,” the “Honest Consciousness,” the struggle of the “Noble and Base Consciousness,” etc., etc., these separate sections contain, but still in an estranged form, the *critical* elements of whole spheres such as religion, the state, civil life, etc. [...] [t]he distinct forms of estrangement which makes their appearance are, therefore, only various forms of consciousness and self-consciousness.¹⁰⁵

These distinct forms, according to our analysis, are just different forms of negation and the negation of and by itself. It is for this reason and no other that Marx sees the dialectic of negativity as the final outcome of the *Phenomenology*.¹⁰⁶

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is by itself the outline of his entire philosophy. While the *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows how the Hegelian subject becomes conscious of itself as substance, Hegel’s *Logic*, philosophy of nature and philosophy of mind display how substance expresses itself as subject. The negation of and by itself as the subject most intuitively shows its own actual, lively and active content in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, even if that content is shown in inverted form. Through the previous analysis we may now know how it is that Hegel understands the free subjectivity of self-consciousness through the most basic essence of logic and dialectic that is “the negation of and by itself,” and how he understands the actual human subject’s activity from the side of abstraction, “[h]ence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.”¹⁰⁷ However, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this negating and externalizing essence of the subject is still formally shown in an external manner, which is to say, this essence is only discovered by us (those of us who do phenomenology) after the fact, while for consciousness (the subject) it is being in-itself and never enters awareness. Therefore, it is only a “foreign measure” while we demonstrate the course of consciousness’s essence, even though with regard to content this measure is also the inherent essence or intrinsic substance of consciousness itself. Only at the final stage of “absolute knowing” is the conscious subject finally conscious of this negation originally being the affirmative essence of itself in the first place, at which point “this self-relinquishing [externalizing] does not only have a negative meaning but rather a positive one as well, and not only for us, or in itself, but also for self-consciousness itself.”¹⁰⁸ Because of this, we can say that throughout the unfolding progression of the entire *Phenomenology of Spirit* before it reaches its final stage, the dialectic of the negative becomes everywhere the inner motivating force playing a role “behind the scenes,” but for consciousness and self-consciousness this dialectic as such remains in-itself and only indirectly expressed. The dialectic of the negative only unfolds itself with self-awareness for-itself singly and self-sufficiently as a pure method and logical force after transitioning to the *Science of Logic*, where it immediately and originally displays all of its different levels along with the logical progression from abstract levels to concrete levels. In this way, after we examine

the sense of Hegel's concept of negation and the active expressions of it as the free subject of self-consciousness, we also have to look at the relationship of the negative principle to Hegel's other principles and see how the negative principle functions as the ground, source and inner soul running through all of Hegel's other principles, which is to say, we have to examine the leading role that "negation" occupies in Hegel's dialectic.

Notes

- 1 Translator: The first rendering, *zhu-ti-xing* 主体性, underscores the physical and mental *substance* (*ti* 体) of the dominant host (*zhu* 主) of objects perceptual, affective, imagined, cognized etc., while the second rendering, *zhu-guan-xing* 主观性, emphasizes the subject as host (*zhu* 主) of the mental *processing* of objects, i.e., the perceptual, imaginative and cognitive viewing (*guan* 观) or conceiving of objects. Hence, the latter generally conveys the negative connotations of "subjective" in English, that is, those pejorative implications like "not-objectively true" and "expressing more of the subject's private interests, habitually ingrained prejudices and inner world of intentional mental processing" instead of the object's own properties and intrinsic attributes. The first rendering, *zhu-ti-xing*, is better for expressing the positive implications of having subjectivity, that is, being those active substances (*ti* 体) with "agency" (*zhu* 主) and "freedom" in contrast to those passive objects or merely reactive substances that are at the most "patients" of such activity. This conceptual difference is not presented by the English word "subjectivity," even though that latter is often used to express these different senses in a philosophical context.
- 2 Hegel 2018, 12; italics in original.
- 3 Ibid., 24; italics in original.
- 4 Ibid., 21.
- 5 Hegel 1991, 105.
- 6 Ibid., 58.
- 7 Hegel 2010, 676.
- 8 Lenin 2003, 201.
- 9 Ibid., 203.
- 10 Hegel 1991, 98.
- 11 Hegel 2010, 689.
- 12 Cramer 1976, 392–3.
- 13 Marx & Engels 1988, 145–6.
- 14 Derrida 2012, 154; italics in original.
- 15 Marx & Engels 1988, 149; italics in original.
- 16 Hegel 1820: 456. The English rendering of this passage, drawn from Hegel's 1820 lecture, is translated by (Rose 2014).
- 17 Hegel 1820, 455.
- 18 Hegel 2018, 231; italics in original.
- 19 Ibid., 232; italics in original.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 22 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 23 Ibid., 233; italics in original.

- 24 Gadamer 1976, 35.
- 25 Ibid., 52.
- 26 Ibid., 51–2.
- 27 Hegel 2018, 234.
- 28 Cramer 1976.
- 29 See (Cramer 1976, 379).
- 30 Spinoza 1955, 10.
- 31 Cramer 1976, 375.
- 32 Ibid., 376.
- 33 Hegel 2018, 103.
- 34 Cramer 1976, 378–9.
- 35 Ibid., 392.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Hegel 2018, 238.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., 239; italics in original.
- 42 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 43 Hegel 2018, 239; italics in original.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Wang 1988, 14.
- 47 Ibid., 15.
- 48 Hegel 1975, 183.
- 49 Hegel 1991, 233.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., 218.
- 53 Hegel 2018, 242.
- 54 Ibid., 241–2; italics in original.
- 55 Ibid., 242; italics in original.
- 56 Ibid., 243.
- 57 Ibid., 115; italics in original.
- 58 Ibid., 116; italics in original.
- 59 Marx & Engels 1988, 152–3.
- 60 Hegel 2018, 244.
- 61 Ibid., 245.
- 62 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 63 Marx & Engels 1988, 150; italics in original.
- 64 Gadamer 1976, 73.
- 65 Ibid., 73.
- 66 Hegel 2018, 117.
- 67 Ibid., 117.
- 68 Xue 1983, 75.
- 69 See (Marx & Engels 1988, 80).
- 70 Hegel 2018, 118.
- 71 Peking 1961, 373.
- 72 Hegel 2018, 118; italics in original.

- 73 Ibid., 121.
- 74 Ibid., 127.
- 75 Ibid., 128.
- 76 Ibid., 132.
- 77 Ibid., 133; italics in original.
- 78 Ibid., 134; italics in original.
- 79 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 80 Ibid., 136; italics in original.
- 81 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 82 Ibid., 137.
- 83 Marx 1999, 2.1.
- 84 Hegel 2018, 139.
- 85 Marx 1987, 148.
- 86 See (Matroshilova 1985, 48–9).
- 87 Hegel 2018, 203.
- 88 Ibid., 201; italics in original.
- 89 Ibid., 202; italics in original.
- 90 Ibid., 215.
- 91 Ibid., 216.
- 92 Ibid., 224.
- 93 Ibid., 227.
- 94 Ibid., 243.
- 95 Ibid., 249.
- 96 Tyler 1977, 32.
- 97 Hegel 2018, 204; italics in original.
- 98 Ibid., 204–5; italics in original.
- 99 Ibid., 205.
- 100 Marx 1974, 20; italics in original.
- 101 Ibid. For detail, see the section “Alienated Labor” in (Marx & Engels, 1988) and my essay *Alienated Labor and Its Origins* (1983–03) for my explanation of it. Italics in original.
- 102 Marx & Engels 1988, 150.
- 103 Zhang 1986, 152.
- 104 Marx & Engels 1988, 27.
- 105 Hegel 1988, 148–9; italics in original.
- 106 Ibid., 149.
- 107 Marx & Engels 1969, 13; italics in original.
- 108 Hegel 2018, 454. (brackets added by translator)

3 The status of negation in Hegel's dialectic

Engels points out the three main laws of dialectics in the *Dialectics of Nature*:

The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and *vice versa*;
The law of the interpenetration of opposites;
The law of the negation of the negation.

All three are developed by Hegel in his idealist fashion as mere laws of thought: the first, in the first part of his *Logik*, in “Die Lehre vom Seyn”; the second fills the whole of the second and by far the most important part of his *Logik*, “Die Lehre vom Wesen”; finally the third figures as the fundamental law for the construction of the whole system.¹

Engels thus basically summarizes the status of the principle of negation in the Hegelian dialectic here, but further clarification is still needed. People in the past have put extra focus on the analysis and treatment of “the interpenetration of opposites” (or unity of opposites) due to the importance that this law holds in Hegel's *Logic*, while relatively ignoring, however, Hegel's principle of negation as “the fundamental law for the construction of the whole system.” It seems that since Hegel's whole system had been seen as “conservative” in the eyes of Marx and Engels, this rendered the laws constructing the system less than brilliant or at least not worthy of greater attention, yet when discussing the dialectical thought of Rousseau, Engels mentions:

[A] whole series of the same dialectical turns of speech as Marx used: processes which in their nature are antagonistic, contain a contradiction; transformation of one extreme into its opposite; and finally, as the kernel of the whole thing, the negation of the negation.²

Clearly in Marx's eyes, the negation of the negation is seen as the core of the other laws of dialectics. Additionally, in past textbooks people have generally split up the three main laws of dialectics for separate treatment, while very few have seriously worked out the interrelation between these laws. Furthermore, when specifically getting into the negation of the negation,

people have restricted the focus to those passages on negation in “the Absolute Idea” chapter of the *Science of Logic* (of course, the principle of negation appears in this chapter in pure shapes like that of the pure logical Idea and pure methodological form), while overlooking the intrinsic role of this principle in the development of the logical concept prior to all of this. They have failed to notice that the principle of negation is more than just the basic method for constructing the whole system formally speaking, but also the internal ground and core law behind the construction of every one of Hegel’s methods. In the philosophy circles of the Soviet Union, there was a significant period of time in which people advocated for excluding the law of the negation of the negation from the laws of dialectics and for replacing it with the more everyday formulation “the stages of movement forward.” In the 1960s, Soviet scholars also began to see the important status of this law, as Zaid Orudzhev proposed in 1968 that the law of the negation of the negation is the most concrete law in comparison with the other laws of dialectics and that it gathers the other laws of dialectics into itself as moments (or elements) of itself and contains them “in sublated form.”³ However, it is odd that based on his argument (we do not have Orudzhev’s original text in our hands and have to rely on the paraphrasing), such “concreteness” rather illustrates that the negation of the negation, according to this viewpoint, is not the most fundamental law in comparison with the other two laws (that of quality and quantity transforming into one another and that of the interpenetration of opposites), and to the contrary, those two other laws are even “more fundamental” than the negation of the negation.⁴ Evald Ilyenkov also agrees with this point, but he adds: the law of the negation of the negation is secondary not only thanks to “concreteness” but also to having at the same time greater “universality” (!), so he draws the following strange conclusion: what the negation of the negation reflects is neither the core of dialectics nor the basic feature or principle of the dialectic, but is instead the ordination and interconnection, the coordination and interrelation of these features or principles.⁵ In other words, despite the negation of the negation being the most concrete law with the greatest universality, it is only a formal framework outside of the dialectical core that organizes it into an orderly whole! Ilyenkov believes, in this way, he could define the negation of the negation as the following law of dialectics: it expresses the particular form of movement generated by the struggle of opposites.⁶ That is to say, the negation of the negation is substantively just the form of expression that the struggle of contradictions or law of the unity of opposites takes and nothing more. Domestically in the philosophical circles of China, to my knowledge, Xiao Kundao appears to be the first person (in 1980) to have presented the negation of the negation as the foremost principle of dialectics, and this point is precisely the thesis that this section sets out to prove. We will unfold our demonstration on three separate levels, according to the “Doctrine of Existence,” the “Doctrine of Essence” and the “Doctrine of the Concept” respectively, in line with Hegel’s systematic structure in the *Science of Logic*.

Negation as a leap

Ordinarily, when people discuss Hegel's law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, they all speak of "a leap." However, the true significance and importance of leaps in the linked changes of quantity and quality rarely receive any in-depth analysis. I think understanding the concept of "a leap" is crucial for grasping the law of transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa: but this also means at the same time that the law of quantity and quality transforming into one another is the embodiment of the principle of negation within the most basic pair of categories of "being" (quality and quantity), because what Hegel calls "leap" (in German, *Sprung*; in Chinese, alternatively *feiyue* 飞跃, *chaoyue* 超越 *tiaoyue* 跳跃) is essentially nothing more than an expression of "negation." Qualitative change is a leap, which also means it is a becoming of negativity just as the incremental nature of quantitative change is a becoming of positivity. Therefore, to understand the concept of "a leap," we first have to look at how Hegel elucidates the categories of quality and quantity and the interrelationship of the two.

We know that Hegel starts at the very beginning of the *Science of Logic* with "quality" ("pure being" is nothing less than the first stage of "quality," which the *Minor Logic* makes quite clear) and then transitions into "quantity." This sequence runs squarely in the opposite direction of Kant's judgment and categorization in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant reduces quality to "intensive magnitude" from the transcendental and formalist viewpoint of "the anticipation of perception," insisting that we can only bring quality into scientific knowledge by first understanding quantity. This is because *science* as Kant understands it is only the positivist science of precise quantifications, but Kant divides categories according to "the four moments" of quality, quantity, relation and modality in "The Analytic of Beauty" part of the *Critique of Judgment*, because the task here is to find the universal principle for the experienced qualities of already given sensation and not to (scientifically) regulate the qualities of sensation with the universal principle. However, Hegel's sequence here, certainly aside from illustrating his belief in the greater immediacy and abstraction of the concept of quality over that of quantity, also shows the difference between Hegel's understanding of science and Kant's on a much deeper level; it shows Hegel grounds science from the very beginning in the dialectical standpoint of the active negativity of the concept itself and on determination (quality) as negation. Beginning from quality is to begin from the determinateness of negation, because quality is nothing but "absolute negativity."⁷ Quality contains in-itself the active principle of the negation of the negation. A specified quality (determinate being) is itself the result of the negation of the negation (being, nothing, becoming); it is because it is determinate that it must therefore negate itself. However:

Incidentally, this much is correct concerning the confusion mentioned here of existence as being that is determined [*Dasein als bestimmtes Sein*]

with abstract being, namely that the moment of negation is, indeed, still contained merely in a veiled state, as it were, in existence, while the moment of negation emerges freely only in being-for-itself and there assumes its rightful position.⁸

So-called “being-for-itself,” “as relation to itself,” “is immediacy, and as the relation of the negative to itself it is a being that is for itself [*Fürsichseiendes*], the One.”⁹ It enters the relationship of “the one” to “the many,” which is the quantitative relation, meaning that, in Hegel’s view, even though quality already contains in-itself the principle of the negative’s relation to itself, this negative’s relation to itself “emerges freely only” by entering the quantitative relation, wherein it alone is capable of truly subsuming (negates) quality itself. But how does Hegel pass from quality into quantity? This problem is rarely well understood in Hegelian research. Some even think: “the transformation from ‘quality’ to ‘quantity’ is fabricated out of thin air.”¹⁰ However, I think, to understand this point, we need to trace it back to the transitional relation between the *apeiron* (the unlimited, the boundless) and the *peirar* (limit, boundary) in ancient Greek philosophy. As we have previously said in Volume 1, before Pythagoras proposed the principle of “number,” the Meletians had already hosted some philosophies advocating for the *apeiron*, but these schools of the boundless or unlimited (which also includes Heraclitus to some degree) always stopped short at a few sensuous qualities (water, air, fire). They never found a certain foundation and consequently fell prey to “the bad infinite” (to use Hegel’s words), “[s]omething becomes an other, but the other is itself a something, hence it likewise becomes an other, and so on and so forth ad infinitum.”¹¹ This “bad” view of the unlimited (infinite) can never go beyond the limited (finite) singular thing; it always bases itself on sensuous, finite, singular things to understand the infinite underlying substance of beings, and consequently, it forever seeks in vain for this infinite underlying substance. Inversely, Pythagoras held the limited (the finite) to be higher than the unlimited (infinite). By going beyond the infinitely diverse sensuousness of the world and determining (qualifying) the infinite underlying substance from a higher level, the Pythagoreans reached a philosophy that for the first time grasped the “true infinity” of the sensuous world, that is, the discovery of “the true infinite [...] the first step toward metaphysics.”¹² The restless pursuit of the infinity of the sensuous world found calm in universal “number.” Any sensuous thing (at least as “one” thing) possesses its own determinateness in a number or quantity, bigger or smaller. This sort of determinateness transcends all sensuous qualities and remains in possession of its own identity amid the sensuous world’s infinite qualitative diversity. However, the Pythagorean “number” still fails to completely draw a clear boundary with sensuous quality and is still explained as some “thing” concrete; its identity is still only the self-identity of the “small one” (unit). Therefore, the Pythagoreans are still only a “bridge” between the sensible world and the supersensible world.¹³ To truly enter a principle of “pure quantity,” the number will first have to receive baptism

from Eleatic *Being*, “the greater one,” and also absorb, from Heraclitus, the principle of “becoming,” and from Democritus, the atom, because it is already no longer simply a mathematical principle but a principle of mechanics (attraction and repulsion) as well. Even more importantly, number has already become at this point a principle of motion based on “being.” Therefore, the atom embodies “being-for-itself,” which contains the two moments of “the one” (being) and “the empty” (non-being); it is simultaneously “that which lacks inward distinction” and also that which is “*excluding* the *Other* from itself.”¹⁴ The atom therefrom enters the quantitative relation of “the one and the many.” Clearly, atomism transcends the pursuit after the sensuous world’s qualitative boundlessness and sublates the unlimited diversity of quality with the limited atom: “being-for-itself consists in having thus transcended limitation, its otherness; it consists in being, as this negation, the infinite turning back into itself.”¹⁵ However, this transition in Hegel is generally unclear and incomprehensible for people, because atomism does not, like the Pythagorean “number,” clearly show the concrete process by which it ascends from sensuous quality up into quantity, or how it rises beyond the infinite (unlimited) up into the finite (limited), but instead conceals this process inside of itself in sublated form.

In a sense, qualitative infinity returning by way of this very transcendence or negation of itself back into being limited could already be seen as a “leap.” There is an incommensurability here between sensuous quality and abstract quantity (the one): quantity is so far from “a kind” of quality; it is instead that which contains all qualities in itself yet that which is however nowhere to be found in quality; it cannot be understood through quality and can only be understood by transcending quality; it is the product of the irresolvable contradiction of the finite and infinite in quality itself, so from the viewpoint of quality it looks like it is something self-contradictory, a limited thing that has actualized the unlimited, a quality belonging to all without any quality whatsoever. But Hegel still does not employ the word “leap” here. He only uses this word in the opposite sense of “gradualness” (*Allmählichkeit*). Gradual progression is the process of quantitative accumulation on the basis of one certain quality. In this process of accumulation, the transformation of quantity exhibits total indifference to that one certain quality. It is merely the continual affirmation of this quality on condition of not altering it. Hegel argues:

But quality is alterable, too, and the previously mentioned difference between quantity and quality is then expressed as a matter of increasing or decreasing. This implies that the basic matter remains what it is, regardless of the direction in which the determination of magnitude is changed.¹⁶

Thus, the determinateness of quantity is not the same as being (for example, we can say “this is red,” “this is a flower” etc., but we cannot immediately

say: “this is three”), and abstracting a quantity from a difference of quality is the transcending of a specific being (Dasein, determinate being), which is not achieved through the infinite regress from one quality to another, but is achieved instead all at once through the reverse functioning of language, which is to say, it only takes reflecting upon the relationship of two qualities to attain “being-for-itself” and *the one*:

In the relation to an other, something is itself already an other opposite it. Hence, since that into which it makes the transition is entirely the same as that which makes the transition (both have no further determination than this, which is one and the same, the determination to be an other), something comes together only with itself in its transition into something other.¹⁷

This is utilizing the universal or the word “another” to posit “something that lacks inward distinction,” that is stripped of all qualities and is “one.” The inverse of this, that is, the transition from accumulating quantity to a new quality, requires actually passing through the entire series of changes in quantity, which is not realized linguistically through the reverse functioning of a word, but is grasped concretely through the specified relation (or ratio) of one quantity to another. However, this relation covers an infinite progression that is completed and covers the sublation of the infinity unique to quantity. Through this very sublation, a quantity that is based on one quality reaches a higher level of quality, on the basis of which the subsequent change in quantity enlarges by a new scale, which is what Hegel calls “the interruption of gradual increase,” that is, “a leap.” There is incommensurability here as well, but it is no longer just the incommensurability of quality with quantity, but is instead the incommensurability of an old quality with a new quality. This incommensurability is no longer from the separation of sensibility and the abstractions (universals) of reason, but is instead the separating of two qualities due to infinite growth in quantity. Engels remarks on this point:

When mathematics speaks of the infinitely large and infinitely small, it introduces a qualitative difference which even takes the form of an unbridgeable qualitative opposition: quantities so enormously different from one another that every rational relation, every comparison, between them ceases, that they become quantitatively incommensurable. Ordinary incommensurability, for instance of the circle and the straight line, is also a dialectical qualitative difference; but here it is the difference in *quantity* of *similar* magnitudes that increases the difference of *quality* to the point of incommensurability.¹⁸

A division of this kind could simultaneously be viewed as a form of integration: two qualities, different in kind, are linked through a change in quantity. It is solely the infinity of quantitative change that is responsible for the

“rupture” or “leap” that takes place between two different kinds of quality, which prove to be two incommensurably different “measures” of quantity, among which the (higher) measure seems for the standpoint of the other (lower) measure to be “measureless.” But this only illustrates that pure and simple “quantity” is a limited and narrow viewpoint that cannot grasp the infinite connectivity of things.

Now, when we look back from this higher standpoint of reciprocal changes in quality and quantity, or “measures,” to reconsider these two processes of transition: one is a transcendence of qualitative change arriving at quantity; the other a leap from quantitative change over into quality. We could very well contain the former process (of transcending) within the latter process (of leaping) and use the same concept of “a leap” to cover the entire progression of quality, quantity and magnitude. Now that from this point of view all qualities already come into being from a leap in quantitative change, they consequently have measure; “the immediate qualities also belong to measure, are likewise connected and stand in a ratio.”¹⁹ “The two qualities are not indeterminate in their difference, for they are the moments of measure and the qualification of [measure].”²⁰ Visibly, a quality surpasses itself in the shaping of a new unit (“one”), a new measure, and the process of making up the basis of quantitative change from this is only one moment of the leap, which, compared to the old quality before it, is the unfolding of quantitative change on the larger scale or by the measure of the new quality. Insofar as we set the qualities as the end points (as Hegel does), we are effectively already viewing the entire process as a leaping from quality to quality and from measure to measure, while the positing of quantity and the incremental growth of quantity become the mediators and means of the qualitative leap. Therefore, even though Hegel does not use the word “leaping” in the transitional passage from quality into quantity (he instead uses “surpassing”), we may still concretely understand it as a leap. At the end of the day, the linkage of quality and quantity transforming into one another can only reach completion and gain concrete understanding in “The Doctrine of Being” by aid of the “leap,” which is the form of negation of and by itself. Throughout this process, the focus of Hegel’s attention is the relationship of “the infinite” to “the finite.” Because this relation involves that between negation and affirmation (the infinite and the unlimited amount to the negative; the finite and limited amount to the affirmative), we have to dive deeper into this here as well.

Hegel differentiates the qualitative limit from the quantitative limit.²¹ He additionally points out, both the infinite progression of quantity and that of quality, “is the expression not of true Infinity but only of the spurious infinity.”²² In § 111 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, he also says with a conclusive tone:

The Infinite, the affirmation as the negation of the negation, now has quality and quantity for its sides. These sides (a) *have passed over* into one another: quality into quantity (§ 98) and quantity into quality (§ 105), and they have thus exhibited themselves to be *negations*.²³

These statements illustrate that for Hegel, the relationship of the finite and the infinite runs through the entire passage of quality over into quantity and of quantity over into quality, and moreover, that it only possesses this power to run through the entire process as the affirmative relation of the negation of the negation, namely as the truly infinite relation. The passing over from quality into quantity is already a negation of the negation: "Even the first sublation, the negation of quality as such whereby the quantum is posited, is in itself the sublation of negation—quantum is sublated qualitative limit, consequently sublated negation."²⁴ But quantum itself is a concept that is the negation of and by itself; it enters itself into a relation of infinite progression toward some other quantum, which it sees (also hypothesized to be finite and determinate) as the infinite beyond that it forever seeks in vain to reach (like "the infinitely large" and "the infinitely small"). Precisely because this infinite is forever unreachable, it is a quantum that is qualitatively differentiated and consequently incommensurable with said quantum; as such, it is effectively a new quality. Therefore, quantum sublates its "bad" infinite progression in this new quality and becomes the "true" infinity, namely infinity that comes with "measure" and is hence actually graspable. This could be called the "second" sublation that sublates the opposition of the "two quanta" (i.e., the very first quantum and that infinite quantum posited through its negation of and by itself), which makes them become "moments of *one* unity" and stand in a ratio.²⁵ Hegel insists, the first sublation is "in-itself," while the second sublation is "being-determined-for-itself."²⁶ In other words, the first sublation is clinched through quantum's "indifference" to quality by viewing quality as "external determination." The second sublation is then clinched through quantum's search for itself by way of purposeful infinite progression ("ought"), which becomes a "self-reference" and restores the qualitative determination and finally marks entry into the unity of quality and quantity (the ratio or measure). The first sublation is the sublation of quality's endless infinity (sensibility), which enables it for the first time to acquire the limit and rule of rationality (the Latin word *ratio* originally meant fraction, reckoning, proportion), but this rule (quantity) itself is still at this point mechanically pieced together without any purpose. It is capable of both increase and diminishment; even if it sets a purpose, this purpose is still outside of it (another beyond it). Quantity only recovers quality and actualizes the purpose that is potentially in itself through the second sublation alone by which it accomplishes the leap of the entire process of passage (quality, quantity, quality, or magnitude). At this point, the finite's progression to the infinite no longer belongs to our reflection, but instead unfolds as the contradiction of continuity and discontinuity in being itself (in quantity itself); it unfolds as the necessary process of the thing itself rising through a certain hierarchical ordination of degrees. Here, Hegel draws largely on examples from mathematics and natural sciences to illustrate for people the unity of the finite and the infinite, and the unity of

continuity and discontinuity as the process of the thing itself leaping from lower degree to higher degree of (purposeful) quality. Hegel states:

In the sphere of existence, the qualitative infinite was the irruption of the infinite into the finite, the immediate transition and vanishing of the “this here” into its “beyond there.” In contrast to it, the quantitative infinite is in its very determinateness the continuity of quantum, its continuing beyond itself. The qualitatively finite becomes infinite; the quantitatively finite is its beyond in it: it points beyond itself. But this infinite of the specification of measure posits both the qualitative and the quantitative as each sublating itself into the other [...] This unity which thus continues in itself in its alternating measures is the self-subsistent matter that truly persists, the fact.²⁷

All of the material world of Nature has been an uninterrupted process of leaping from one quality to another quality, from one measure to another measure, that is, a continuous process of this immanent here immediately passing over and vanishing into the other side beyond, during which, the emergence of each new quality and consequently the emergence of every new relation of quality and quantity or measure make up those few “knots” (i.e., points where quality and quantity intercross) in the infinite progression, while the continuous lines of these knots make up the “knotted lines.” As Hegel sees it, these knotted lines by no means unfold as the progression of yet another “bad” infinite, but likewise ought to be a true infinite progression of turning back to itself, which should also be a process of actualizing the “potentiality” (or purposiveness) implicitly belonging to “matter,” or the thing in-itself, a process of revealing the higher within the lower. “Essence was already implicit within measure, and its process consists simply in its positing itself as what it is in-itself.”²⁸ We could argue for this very reason that what the knotted lines relating quality and quantity show is a process of purposeful elevation, which is only possible through a leap from quality to quality, from lower quality to higher quality. Being reverts back to itself at a higher degree as this infinite process itself is sublated: it goes into *hiding*: “The essence is being which goes into hiding behind the scenes.”²⁹ Being, as the unchangeable substrate, is essence itself. The “sublation” that takes place here could be seen as “the third sublation.” For the sake of reaching that unchangeable, “true infinite,” hidden behind the infinitely changing, the differentiation of quality and quantity along with their unity that is “measure” all vanish; they have all become undifferentiated, external and “indifferent” for the substrate; they have been sublated by “the negative totality.”³⁰ This third sublation sublates the entirety of “The Doctrine of Being,” which seems to be a reverting back to the indifference and externality of the first sublation (from quality to quantity), but it no longer goes above and beyond being; instead, it delves deeper under and below being. So, inside this sphere of “essence” itself, each determinateness no longer emerges with

external, indifferent independence, but instead they emerge in pairs, each as one moment of the unitary substrate paired with the moment that corresponds to it, none of which connects together via external reflection with another determination, but instead every determination is posited alone by itself in connection with another determination.

Clearly, the dialectics of the negative is still implicit in the “Doctrine of Being”; it is only revealed through external reflection. The dialectics of the negative is only explicitly posited in “the Doctrine of Essence” (as well as in the transition from the “Doctrine of Being” to the “Doctrine of Essence”). At the stage of Being, the dialectics of the negative mainly unfolds as the finite’s relation with the infinite, as the true infinite’s sublation of the bad infinite, as the process of quality negating itself and leaping to a new quality in the infinite progression of quantity. However, these relations and processes always still stop short at the expression of the affirmative and the finite; “the expression for ‘there is’ [the giving, *geben* of ‘*es gibt*’] is the sort of expression that points to something finite.”³¹ Such relations and processes never express the internal activity of self-negation [of and by itself]. For instance, the “true infinite” that has sublated the opposition of the finite and the infinite is still itself a finite quantity or quality (measure), but the difference between one quality (measure) and another quality (measure) is still grasped in terms of difference in quantity. “Thus the difference is also not conceptually grasped qualitatively, and the substance is not determined as self-differentiating, as subject.”³² To truly grasp the difference of the thing qualitatively, to grasp “the immanent emergence of distinctions,” we must neither simply pass from one quality (something) over into another quality (something else) that negates it, nor simply externally go beyond quality, using quantity or measure to regulate quality, but must consider quality instead with respect to itself as the active negation of and by itself, which is to say, consider quality as a sublated “semblance” and penetrate into that essence that this semblance brings into the light. At the stage of essence, we no longer speak of the finite’s relation to the infinite, because the dialectics of the negative is not itself the relationship of the finite to the infinite, but is instead that infinite moving force pushing this relationship into motion from underneath it. Therefore, in the essence, everything acts in the theater of the infinite: “there is something enduring in things and this primarily is the essence.”³³ “But in speaking of essences, one is actually beyond finitude.”³⁴ Because the concept of the “infinite” is itself a concept of negativity and a concept of movement and change (just as the ancient Greeks first formulated it as “the boundless”), the foremost task of the “Doctrine of Essence” is to explicitly posit the dialectics of active negativity. “[E]ssence is what it is, not through a negativity foreign to it, but through one which is its own—the infinite movement of being.”³⁵ Consequently, “it is itself this negativity.”³⁶

This self-negativity, as essence, is presented in the Doctrine of Essence mainly in the form of the self-contradictory, or in that of the unity of opposition.

Negation as contradiction

The doctrine of contradiction, or that of the unity of opposition, comes in similar formulations such as “the identity of opposites,” “the struggle of opposites,” “the interpenetration of opposites,” “the identity of contradictions” and so on. This book does not set out to make meticulous distinctions thereof, but instead sees them all as roughly one and the same thing, which is ordinarily considered to be the core of dialectics. Lenin explicitly formulated this point in his notebooks on philosophy. Engels also directly calls dialectics “dialectics of contradiction” in *Anti-Dühring*. In Hegel's *Logic*, this doctrine is most systematically elucidated in the “Doctrine of Essence.” Consequently, Engels saw the “Doctrine of Essence” as the most important part of Hegel's *Logic*. Few, however, have taken a deeper look at the problem of the relationship between the doctrine of contradiction and the doctrine of negation. In Engels, still only a rough determination was given to this problem in pointing out the fact that the first part of the *Logic* clarifies the law of the transformation of quality into quantity and vice versa, that the second part (the “Doctrine of Essence”) clarifies the law of the unity of opposites, and that the “the third law,” that is, the negation of the negation, is the basic law for the composition of the whole system. Engels does not, however, explain why the third law is not put under the third part of the *Logic*, “The Doctrine of the Concept” (even though such would appear more symmetrical). Yet, he explicitly states:

We are not concerned here with writing a handbook of dialectics, but only with showing that the dialectical laws are real laws of development of nature, and therefore are valid also for theoretical natural science. Hence we cannot go into inner inter-connection of these laws with one another.³⁷

Since Marx and Engels never had the time to write a systematic work (or handbook) of dialectics, the interconnection of these laws also never received logically consistent clarification on the foundation of dialectical materialism. They rather left this task to posterity.

Lenin arguably already began investigating this problem. “The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts [...] is the *essence* (one of the ‘essentials,’ one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features).”³⁸ “The essence,” “one of the essentials,” “one of the principal characteristics or features,” and “the principal characteristics or features” are all modifiers of different magnitude and quality showing that Lenin here is measuring and exploring. One scholar of the Soviet Union, Sergey Kiselyov, pointed out in *On Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks* that we should view *The Philosophical Notebooks* as Lenin's philosophical thought laboratory in which several different principles have already matured into final ideas, but some others are only initial ideas still in the rough draft state preparing for further

determination.³⁹ Apparently, although Lenin saw the unity of opposites as the essence of dialectics, he still did not make definitive conclusions about the relation of this law to the other laws, especially to the law of the negation of the negation. Therefore, Lenin at one point specifically underscores the law of the negation of the negation in the section “Conspectus of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” calling it “the essence of dialectics,” “Truth as such,” and “negativity, which is the inherent pulsation of self-movement and vitality.”⁴⁰ He also dives deeper into this law analyzing it in the following way:

Not empty negation, not futile negation, *not skeptical* negation, vacillation and doubt is characteristic and essential in dialectics,—which undoubtedly contains the element of negation and indeed as its most important element—no, as a moment of development, retaining the positive, i.e., without any vacillations, without any eclecticism.⁴¹

He cites Hegel’s exposition of this point (about the negation of negation) and jots down the comment, “[t]his is very important for understanding dialectics.”⁴² When Lenin lists the 16 elements of dialectics, he views the law of the transition of quality into quantity and vice versa (No. 16) as “examples” of the unity and transition of opposites into each other (No. 9), but does not explicitly indicate the status of the law of the negation of the negation (Nos. 13–14). How then is No. 9 explained? In the following way: “not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other [into its opposite?].”⁴³ The phrasing “*transitions* [...] into *every* other [into its opposite]” is itself a formulation of self-negation [of and by itself], which is clearly different from those formulations of “the unity of opposites” like “contradiction” and “the struggle of opposites” (No. 4, No. 5 and No. 6). The latter formulations could all be reduced to the “doctrine of the unity of opposites,” which, although it “embodies the essence of dialectics,” for Lenin still “requires explanations and development.”⁴⁴ This is so because, generally speaking, “the unity of opposites” could be pointing to two things at first external to one another entering into an interrelation of unity, contradiction and struggle, while (positionally) transitioning into one another, but it does not necessarily point to each and every determination itself transitioning into its opposite, its other or its negative. Therefore, it does not necessarily express “the *development* of this thing, (phenomenon, respectively), its own movement, its own life” (No. 3). Hence, it is still possible that it is not dialectics in the thorough sense of the term. We can see in Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* that he always sets sights in view of development, self-movement and vitality wherever he highlights the principle of negation. For this reason, it is not enough to simply say “the unity of opposites” in general, insofar as it still must be proven that such movement of opposites and contradictory sides transitioning into one another is in fact the “self-movement” of one identical thing, whose “source of activity” is ultimately each thing’s “self-negation” [of and by itself]. Of course, Lenin does not very

knowingly formulate this point. He is only in the process of considering this problem, hence the question mark added after the phrase “into its opposite?” That being said, he does already note that dialectics is more than just the unity of opposites, insofar as it requires explanations and developments. This much is certain. His concern is actually “‘eternal life’ = dialectics”:

Movement and “self-movement” (this NB! Arbitrary (independent), spontaneous, **internally-necessary** movement), “change,” “movement and vitality,” “the principle of all self-movement,” “impulse” (*Trieb*) to “movement” and to “activity” — the opposite to “*dead Being*”— who would believe that this is the core of “Hegelianism,” of abstract and abstrusen (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism?? This core had to be discovered, understood, hinüberretten, laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels did.⁴⁵

Clearly, simply stating that it is “the unity of opposites” with broad connotations still falls wide of the point. The first Chinese scholar domestically to have underscored the principle of negation and provide it with systematic demonstration is Xiao Kundao, who in his influential article “Exploration Concerning the Scientific Shape of Dialectics” points out the utmost importance of negativity and the negation of the negation as a principle of dialectics in both Marx and Hegel alike. He unites the other principles of dialectics into a whole, and he states, “we could even consider ‘negation’ as synonymous with ‘dialectics.’”⁴⁶ However, regrettably, he still fails to clearly explain the relationship between the principle of negation and that of contradiction. He insists, contradiction is the source of all movement and change, which comes into being out of the struggle of contradictions, “and the struggle arises out of the negativity inside of things.”⁴⁷ But he immediately then asks, “So, what then is this negativity inside of things or this inner pulse of negativity within things that makes up the core of contradiction?” The answer he gives is: “It is but opposites repelling one another. Repulsion is but negation. The opposed sides negate each other and thereby push the contradiction to a head.”⁴⁸ This is a circling back to the point of origin, because “opposites repelling each other” and “negating each other” are just alternative formulations of “contradiction” and “struggle.” Granted, “repulsion” is indeed “negation,” but it is by no means negation of and by itself; it is instead one thing and its opposite (external to it) negating each other, which involves this thing attempting to sustain a static and unchanging affirmation of itself. So, contradiction and struggle arise from “the negativity inside of the thing,” and inner negativity, in turn, arises from “the mutual exclusion of opposites,” that is, contradiction and struggle. We can see from this circular argument is that Xiao Kundao ultimately still understands dialectical negation as the external repulsion (of two opposites already in existence beforehand), which is to say as metaphysical, non-dialectical negation. What must be pointed out here is that Hegel himself never elucidates the inner connectivity of the laws of dialectics. He

never even explicitly proposes how many laws belong to dialectics. It was Engels who first drew this inference from his *Science of Logic*. But we can prove through analysis that in Hegel, dialectics of the negative is the most important principle that runs through all, while the principle of contradiction, or that of the unity of opposites, just like the principle of quality and quantity transitioning into one another are all nothing but manifestations of the law of negation of and by itself.

At the very beginning of the “Doctrine of Essence,” Hegel explains the meaning of “essence.” “Essence” emerges from “being” and sublates another being along with all determinateness, becoming pure and simple “negativity” itself. While the category of “The Doctrine of Being” is always nothing *as being*, negation *as affirmation*, the category of the “Doctrine of Essence” is being *as nothing*, affirmation *as negation*: “a negation which has being only as self-referring.” “In essence, therefore, the becoming, the reflective movement of essence, is the movement from nothing to nothing and thereby back to itself.”⁴⁹ However, affirmation as negation is all about positing negation, this nothing, as a principle of existence, about applying negation (nothing) to negation (nothing) itself and thereby making it become a self-consistent movement from nothing to nothing back to itself. The essence is first of all the negative of being and of all existence, for which reason it has no existence to begin with, yet, it must have its own existence, “it must pass over into existence.”⁵⁰ Otherwise, its negation would be empty; it would vanish of itself without ever producing the negative, without making a difference. “Since essence is at first simple negativity, in order to give itself existence and then being-for-itself, it must now posit in its sphere the determinateness which it contains in principle only in itself.”⁵¹ Because these determinations or categories are affirmations that are negatives, being as non-being, they no longer pass over into each other externally as they did in “The Doctrine of Being”; they no longer rely on external reflection to reveal the intrinsic relation (negation) between two different things (being) but are instead “self-reflections” or self-referring reflections. Because the negatives and the passages over into their opposites become the knowingly explicated essences found within the categories themselves, and every category at the same time posits its opposite, so they “just as the determinations themselves are neither an other as other nor references to some other; they are self-subsisting but, as such, at the same time conjoined in the unity of essence.”⁵² Thanks to the emergence and positing of this inner mechanism of essence’s negation of and by itself, that mode of negation in “The Doctrine of Being,” “the transition” and “the leap” finally give way to the mode of unifying opposites and contradictions in the “Doctrine of Essence.” Put otherwise, external reflection’s unity of opposites finally gives way to self-reflection’s (self-knowingly posited, without need of external explanations) mode of unifying opposites. Those who argue that Hegel’s quality and quantity are already in themselves the unity of opposites (magnitude) are overlooking the difference between this mode of unifying opposites and the categories (like cause and effect) within the “Doctrine of

Essence.” When describing qualities, we can leave quantities completely out of consideration (like describing a rose: the color—red, the smell—fragrant etc.). When calculating quantities, we can also completely ignore qualities (thus establishing pure mathematics); the relation of identity inside of them is revealed through external reflection alone, but as to their own immediate being, they stand in relation as absolutely indifferent to one another (or as Xiao Kundao puts it) “repelling one another.” However, when we explain the cause, we cannot leave out the effect, and when we discuss the effects, we cannot divorce them from the causes of which they are effects. We can, through analysis and reflection, show that quantity and quality are actually inseparable, but this does not stop us from describing them separately. When it comes to such essential categories as those of cause and effect, however, speaking of them separately is total nonsense if not impossible to begin with.

That being said, “not speaking of them separately” is still a far cry from full-blown dialectics. We can speak of two contradictory opposites “con-jointly,” but still see these two opposites and their interrelation as something eternal, absolutely unchanging and absolutely positive, or as a cyclical process of one thing and another alternatively strengthening and weakening. The crux of this substantively non-dialectical (that is, metaphysical) viewpoint consists in *not* positing this reciprocal linkage and mutual changeover of opposites on the principle of self-negation, or the negation of negation, in *not* seeing contradiction as the self-same thing contradicting itself and passing over into its opposite, but rather in seeing contradiction as occurring between two things, or in seeing contradiction as the periodic transition and cycle that is generated through the struggle of mutual repulsion between them. For this reason, contradiction thus understood does not have any necessity to spontaneously self-arise, but is only sustained and set up by external human will, which then loses the activity of sublating itself and consequently of entering a higher level of self-movement, leaving it with no choice but to rest and stagnate at some accomplished level. This so-called “view of contradiction” cannot even reach Hegel’s level of idealist dialectics, let alone materialist dialectics.

Contrary to such a viewpoint, Hegel asserts: “The concept of identity, a simple negativity that refers itself to itself, is not the product of external reflection but derives from being itself.”⁵³ Opposites are therefore identical, not because two different or opposing things externally act on one another, depend on one another and relate to one another, but because one and the same thing is the negation of itself, and at one and the same time, it is the negation of this negation, and hence, it is “absolute negation”; it posits negation as a universal principle whose target is at the same time itself. What we call “opposite,” or the contradictory, is nothing other than the self-distinction that is posited by this identical thing through the negation of itself. For the reason that identity is the identity of the negation negating itself (meaning the negation and the negation of this negation are one and the same negation), “identity is something different [...] the implication is that to be different belongs to identity not externally, but within it, in its nature.”⁵⁴ For

instance, said negation and that negation used to negate said negation are ultimately different (the indifferent cannot as a matter of possibility carry out negation). Because of this, identity does not refer to the external connection of two things, nor does it refer to them having “commonality,” even less does it refer to them being contained together in a “third term” that is common to them both. H.F. Fulda accurately described the relationship between the three moments of Hegel’s syllogism, arguing that, with respect to the specificity of the deductive moment, the middle term in the deduction is not only the third term, for the second moment already takes on the role of mediation, but moreover, that the result of the deductive movement, the synthesis, is not produced by a third term, but instead leads to a third term, which takes over the mediating property from the second moment.⁵⁵ True identity refers to one and the same self-differentiation and self-negation, the principle of the negation of and by itself eternally maintaining self-identity and hence finding itself in the identity of self-movement. Thus, the inverse is also true: “[d]ifference is the negativity that reflection possesses in itself, the nothing which is said in identity discourse, the essential moment of identity itself.”⁵⁶ It is this self-differentiation of identity that brings about the immanent emergence of difference, absolute difference, which is the principle that “there are no two things which are like each other.”⁵⁷ The law that “no two leaves are identical,” which Leibniz took to be empirical fact and derived by way of imagination, in Hegel becomes a logical proposition standing in opposition to the “law of identity” (“the proposition of identity”) in formal logic. For this reason, people often accuse Hegel of breaking the law of identity. If no two things are equal, then even A itself would not equal A (when we say $A = A$, one is the determining A, one is the determined A), then how could we still make the judgment (A is ...), and again, how could we maintain consistency of thought? Actually, Hegel does not deny the law of identity, but rather concretizes the abstract law of identity. He points out that likeness is always the likeness of the unlike, that two things alike are simultaneously unlike.⁵⁸ They are alike in their unlikeness. He furthermore explains, the two moments, likeness and unlikeness in one and the same thing constitute the difference, which is a higher-level difference (“essential difference”), that is, opposition.

There are many who understand opposition (opposites) as motionless and preexisting (things). They are those who either go out on behalf of two opposites, searching for their unifying relationship, to point out that they are not indifferent to one another but are codependent, passing over into one another, permeating one another and struggling with one another, or they analytically parse out two factors from one thing, two sides of the same thing, pointing out that anything “superficially” seeming to be a unity is “actually” made up of two things (sides, components etc.) that are fundamentally opposed. They too speak of the struggle and transformation of opposites; they too speak of things struggling and transitioning, continuously moving without limit or end, but they never see the ultimate ground of such struggle, transition and movement to be the same thing’s or any one thing’s own

negation of itself by itself, that is, the very self-movement of this thing; they never see that "actually" there are no ready-made opposites by the number of two or more, and that it is only one and the same thing's self-negation and the product derived from it (namely, the opposite of itself). In other words, every pair of dialectically opposite things comes into being from one thing through the negation of itself by itself, so these opposites are still the same thing despite standing in opposition. It should be easily discovered that Hegel sees opposites from the perspective of one and the same thing's reflective relation to itself, that is, with respect to the relationship of self-negation and self-affirmation that it contains in itself. One and the same thing negates itself by itself out of the nature of its own essence, and consequently, it differentiates from itself and distinguishes from within itself a likeness that is unlike itself, which is "the positive," along with an unlikeness that is like itself, which is "the negative." The two sides are at the same time both positive and negative, so each reflects the whole and they become respectively self-subsisting.⁵⁹ They also seem like two different "things," precisely for which reason, Hegel reminds us: "It is easiest to grasp the dialectic of the proposition, that the many is one, as external reflection; and, inasmuch as the subject matter also, the many, is a mutual externality, reflection may indeed be external here."⁶⁰ In China, there are some who have proposed that the dialectic should be "one dividing into three," not one dividing into two, based on precisely this external understanding. Since the "two" in their eyes can only be two external things, sticking a "third" term in between them is never impermissible. Based on this reasoning, we could just as well say "one dividing into five," "one dividing into nine" and so on, because they are all nothing more than external expressions of "the one dividing into many," none of which constitute dialectics. We can only usher in true dialectical thought by understanding "one" in the sense of "one thing," that is: the opposite, whether it is "two" or "many," is actually nothing more the one thing standing in opposition to itself, differing with itself, differentiating itself from itself, repelling itself, in a word: negating itself. Hegel on multiple occasions presents the inadequacy of the word "unity" (*die Einheit*):

If it is said of the ground "it is the unity of identity and difference," then by this unity is not to be understood the abstract identity, since we would then have merely another name and, as far as the thought is concerned, we would merely have once again the identity of the understanding itself that has been recognized to be untrue. For this reason, in order to avoid that misunderstanding, one can also say that the ground is not merely the unity, but just as much the difference of the identity and the difference.⁶¹

By comparison, the word "identity" (*die Identität*) is slightly stronger, because what it underscores is opposites coming into being from one and the same thing negating itself by itself, through itself differing with itself.

Opposition so understood means “contradiction” (*Widerspruch*), that is, self-contradiction. In the *Science of Logic*, “Essentiality and Reflective Determination,” Hegel also distinguishes identity, difference (including absolute difference, distinction and opposition) and contradiction, and finally transitions to the next chapter, “Ground,” but in *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, “Pure Reflective Determination,” there are only three headings: identity, difference and ground, while contradiction is merged into distinction (*Unterschied*) and into “opposition.” Clearly, in Hegel’s view, the identity of opposites is substantively the identity of contradiction, which merely expresses the nature of opposition more explicitly and sharply. In other words, opposites are only truly opposites, when understood as one and the same thing positing by itself its own opposite, which it understands as the product derived from negating itself by itself, but the relationship of this opposite to that same thing that it negates is contradiction. Here we must point out, the Chinese word [for contradiction] *maodun* 矛盾 cannot precisely convey the meaning of the word *Widerspruch* in Hegel. *Widerspruch* is composed of two parts, namely *Wider* (violate, oppose) and *Spruch* (language, discourse and especially a maxim or admonition that composes a certain formula); *Widerspruch* expresses the spirit of linguistic logic popular since Aristotle, a spirit that manifests in formal logic’s law of contradiction (that is, non-contradiction) as the impossibility to “simultaneously affirm and deny” something, which is to say it requires the exclusion of self-contradiction in a statement about the same thing. This is the general intellectual background of Hegel’s principle of contradiction. Conversely, the Chinese word *maodun* comes from Hanfei’s story and proverb about simultaneously selling the best shield (*dun* 盾) and the best spear (*mao* 矛); it does not have such a context based in the logic of language; it also does not indicate two statements about the same thing that are self-conflictory in terms of pure logical form, but instead refers to the factual contradiction that would be caused by two descriptions of two different existent things (a spear and a shield) in a certain case (that of “piercing your shield with your spear”). As [the salesman advertises] the shield which “nothing can pierce,” there simply is no logical self-contradiction between it and the spear [he is advertising], which [he claims] “pierces through everything.” Zhu Dianji already saw this point in *The History of Logical Thought in China* (Dianji 1979, 190–2). If we were to express this instance truly in line with the principle of *Widerspruch*, then it would have to be stated thus: the spear both “pierces through everything” and “does not pierce through one thing,” while for the shield, both “nothing can pierce it” and “one thing can pierce it” (that is, the contradiction of being and nothing, being and non-being), in which case alone both the spear and the shield are respectively one thing (spear or shield taken separately) contradicting themselves (similar to the contradiction of “it’s raining today” and “it’s not raining today”). But this kind of *Widerspruch* still is not expressed by the term *maodun*, which instead covers up or replaces the self-contradiction of one thing with the external conflict of two things, or rather, it drops contradiction down to the level of external opposition.

Because of this disparity in language and culture, even when people speak of “the internal *maodun* of something,” they are still referring to the external contradiction of two opposed sides inside of one thing (for this thing, it is an internal affair, but for each side of the contradiction, it is an external affair), while few recognize that contradiction ought to be one and the same thing conflicting with itself. Contradiction is thus rarely recognized for the negation of itself by itself that it is. Hegel thus argues:

[Contradiction] is rather the negative in its essential determination, the principle of all self-movement which consists in nothing else than in the display of contradiction [...] Internal self-movement, self-movement proper, drive in general (the appetite or *nisus* of the monad, the entelechy of the absolutely simple essence) is likewise nothing else than that something is, in itself, itself and the lack of itself (the negative), in one and the same respect.⁶²

Meanwhile, many of us take contradiction to be the external conflict of two things that exist beforehand in the external world.

It should be clear that when people try to reduce the negation of itself by itself in Hegel to contradictoriness but do not reduce contradictoriness to the negation of itself by itself (the contradiction of itself with itself), this reduction conceals a nearly undetectable misunderstanding. “So-called ‘internal negativity’ is in substance the expression of contradiction.”⁶³ The opposite, in fact, is true, insofar as contradictoriness in Hegel is nothing but the expression of self-negation or “internal negativity.” In Hegel, contradiction in its basic sense can only be the negation of itself by itself, the contradiction of self with self, and when it is not, it is only (external) opposition or just difference. For this reason, Hegel often uses contradiction as the synonym of self-negation (“the negative’s reference to itself”), arguing that a thing’s source of self-movement and vitality is the contradiction that it harbors in itself.⁶⁴ But this cannot by any means be understood as: either movement is simply caused by the conflict of two opposed factors already presently contained inside of something, or movement can be divided into two sides, each side of which can also be subdivided into two smaller sides. As Wang Anshi put it, “[a]mong the sides there are still more sides, and the becoming of all beings thereupon proceeds to infinity.”⁶⁵ Because this understanding at every level (and consequently overall) reduces movement to the external conflict of two things, dispersing the contradiction among two things extended in external space, it thus falls into the “bad infinite.” This viewpoint is precisely what Hegel is criticizing:

[Formal thinking] lets the contradictory content that it has before it fall into the sphere of representation, in space and time, where the contradictory is held in external moments, next to and following each other, parading before consciousness without reciprocal contact.⁶⁶

What this view of contradiction and movement obviously leads to is ultimately is the total dissolution of the subject's independence and free will.

It only becomes possible for Hegel to boil contradiction down to "the ground" in the "Doctrine of Essence" by understanding contradiction as something's self-contradiction with itself, as the negation of itself by itself and as "self-movement." In other words, contradiction can become something's inner moving force of "self-movement" simply because this contradiction is the self-contradiction of this something with itself (and not the mutual contradiction of two sides, components or factors that are already presently inside of this thing, and even less so the contradiction of this thing with another something outside of it—these two pictures of contradiction are basically indistinguishable), simply because this thing itself negates itself and overcomes the unrest (or "pain") inside of itself. This internal unrest makes up the general ground of the living impulse or activity inside of each and every thing. Hegel repeatedly mentions in the chapter "Ground," that the ground is "essence that in its negativity is identical with itself," "self-referring negativity" or "the identity of the negative with itself."⁶⁷ The ground constitutes the thing's active "form," or *entelechy*, which enables everything to become "posited" and to become "movement to itself." This ultimate ground is in itself "the groundless"; "it arises from the ground only in so far as the latter has foundered and is no longer ground: it rises up from the groundless, that is, from its own essential negativity or pure form."⁶⁸ Asking what ground there is behind "the negation of itself" (why is something going to negate itself?) is itself meaningless. The negation of itself is that which is finally groundless in itself (this implies freedom in actuality). Strictly speaking, the ground is "absolute becoming" (becoming qua becoming) and the absolutely unconditioned, so it is the final ground, or the absolute condition. We cannot ask why something is going to negate itself, in the same way we cannot ask why something will "change" or whether or not it is "unchangeable"; otherwise, we place the ground outside of things and have no other choice than to fall into infinite regress, which actually makes the true ground impossible. Marx's defense of Epicurus as regards "the swerving motion" of atoms in his *Doctoral Thesis* is a case in point. Many accuse the swerve or declination of Epicurus's atoms for happening without any cause, but Marx retorts:

To inquire after the cause of this determination means therefore to inquire after the cause that makes the atom a principle—a clearly meaningless inquire to anyone for whom the atom is the cause of everything, hence without cause itself.⁶⁹

The swerving motion of declination is precisely for the purpose of transcending the passive determinism of mechanical causality, the bondage of fate, by making "self-movement" the most fundamental principle. The ground of the negation of itself by itself is not something already constituted, but is instead absolute negation itself, which is the negation or annihilation of all that is

already formed (finite); it is the infinite process of “foundering, sinking to the ground” (*zu Grunde gehen*, meaning “perishing”); it is an abyss (*Abgrund*, groundless), “but this abyss, the negative ground, is at the same time the positive ground of the emergence of the existent, of the essence immediate in itself.”⁷⁰ The phenomenal something that comes-into-being out of this ground is existence (*Existenz*). The Chinese translations of the *Science of Logic* and the *Minor Logic* render this word, *Existenz*, as *cunzai* 存在 and *shicun* 实存, neither of which expresses the sense of “emerging from the ground.”

Existence is this groundless ground actively emerging as immediate “appearance,” as “something posited.” “Something is only appearance—in the sense that concrete existence is as such only a posited being, not something that is in- and for-itself.”⁷¹ Amid all of this appearance of the relative, posited and vanishing, amid all of the diversity of both the world of being in-itself and the world that appears, of the totality of the inner and outer, existence is also “the negative exposition” of some kind of positive ground, “the exposition of the determinations, namely that these have the absolute for their abyss, but also for their ground.”⁷² This then arrives at understanding “what the absolute is.”⁷³ What Hegel terms “the absolute” is of course said with reference to God, but we can also see from it that he views negation as the highest and first principle of the actual world: “The absolute [...] is only the negative of reflection and determination in general.”⁷⁴ For this reason, absolute substance is no longer the dead, abstract Being of Spinoza, and is instead only present in accidentality (*Akzidenz*): “This movement of accidentality is the actus of substance as the tranquil coming forth of itself.”⁷⁵ Its necessity as absolute necessity is itself contingency:

But this contingency is rather absolute necessity; it is the essence of those free, inherently necessary actualities. This essence is averse to light, because there is no reflective shining in these actualities, no reflex—because they are grounded purely in themselves, are shaped for themselves, manifest themselves only to themselves—because they are only being. —But their essence will break forth in them and will reveal what it is and what they are. The simplicity of their being, their resting just on themselves, is absolute negativity; it is the freedom of their reflectionless immediacy. This negative breaks forth in them because being, through this same negativity which is its essence, is self-contradiction.⁷⁶

Obviously, here, the essence or ground of contradiction is the negation of itself by itself, which, in turn, is no longer in possession of essence and ground, for it is itself absolute essence and ground, “the freedom of reflectionless immediacy,” in which there is no longer reflective shine. That is, it can no longer reveal itself with external light, for it is the essence of what is shaped only for itself. The only possible answer to the question “why negate itself by itself?” is: this is accidental, but at the same time this is absolutely necessary as well. “The course taken by the substance through causality and reciprocity is thus

merely the process of positing that the self-sufficiency is the infinite, negative relation to itself.”⁷⁷

Thus, at the conclusion of the “Doctrine of Essence,” Hegel transitions to “Subjective Logic” and the “Doctrine of the Concept” with this subjective self-sufficiency and free form understandingly posited by the negation of itself by itself, because “[t]he concept is the free [actuality] [*das Freie*], as the substantial power that is for itself.”⁷⁸

It is in the “Doctrine of Essence” where the inner soul of the Hegelian dialectic, that is, the doctrine of existence, the spiritual factor of *nous*, is presented most vividly, but it still has not been regulated and constrained by the principle of *logos* found in “The Doctrine of the Concept.” Here, what is emphasized is one identical thing moving of itself by virtue of the negation of itself by itself, which is the inner impulse of forward progression from one concept (category) to another concept (category). But as to what the law of this forward progression is (and it is undoubtedly lawful), it remains to be explicitly revealed and determined, while freedom still only emerges in the contingency of absolute necessity without yet disclosing its own conceptual principle. Consequently, in comparison with the “Doctrine of the Concept,” the “Doctrine of Essence” has more plasticity and openness.

Negation as the circle of conceptual development

Hegel insists, the concept is the free actuality because the dialectical movement of the concept unfolds as “development,” which is where the “Doctrine of the Concept” and the “Doctrine of Essence” differ.

Passing over into an other is the dialectical process in the sphere of being and the process of shining in an other within the sphere of essence. The movement of the concept is, by contrast, the development, by means of which that alone is posited that is already on hand in itself.⁷⁹

Clearly, this view of development is tightly aligned with his teleology, for Hegel describes the development of the concept in the teleological sense as a circular process of raising up through the negation of the negation and returning back to itself.

First of all, the starting point of this development ought to be raising something higher up on the foundation of Spinoza’s substance, that is the concept, the subject:

The transition of the relation of substantiality occurs through its own immanent necessity and is nothing more than the manifestation of itself, that the concept is its truth, and that freedom is the truth of necessity.⁸⁰

Substance, when positing itself through absolute negativity, becomes subject and freedom, “the *freedom* which is the identity of the concept.”⁸¹ This

is the true *causa sui*. Thus, substance is unveiled as “the genesis of the concept.”⁸² Hegel takes over Kant’s original synthetic unity of self-consciousness and uses it to explain his own concept of “the concept,” which he holds to be nothing other than “pure self-consciousness,” but differing from Kant, Hegel argues this version of the concept is neither just the abstract form of space nor just the transcendental framework commanding sensuous data external to it, but is instead concrete singularity: “the concept is the ground and the source of all finite determinateness and manifoldness.”⁸³ Therefore, “the concept, since it is not a trivial, empty identity, obtains its differentiated determinations in the moment of negativity or of absolute determining.”⁸⁴ In other words, the inner soul of the concept is negativity, which conquers the abstractness of its own form and extends “reality” out from within the concept itself.⁸⁵ The concept restores being:

The concept, as considered so far, has demonstrated itself to be the unity of being and essence. Essence is the first negation of being, which has thereby become reflective shine; the concept is the second negation, or the negation of this negation, and is therefore being which has been restored once more, but as in itself the infinite mediation and negation of being.⁸⁶

Visibly, here, the starting point for the genesis of the concept is freedom, the subject, the person, the principle of negation as the negation of the negation, that active subjectivity from which reality comes into being.

At first, the immediate form of the concept’s negation of itself by itself manifests as “subjectivity,” the laws of pure thought, that is, “formal logic” in general. In Hegel’s view, this subjectivity of human thought is undoubtedly the first immediate proof of the concept as the true thing in-itself and substance, insofar as it already embodies the concept’s holistic or all-encompassing characteristic, but as the immediate, it is still only an external subjective form, “a reflection external to the subject matter.”⁸⁷ However, Hegel also most clearly recognizes that his “task” here is to make that “fully ready and well-entrenched, one may even say ossified, material, “fluid again, to revive the concept in such a dead matter.”⁸⁸ Hegel attempts to reveal the active self-negating content living underneath the subjective, abstract form of the concept. Thus, his “concept” (*Begriff*) is no longer the abstract concept stripped of all content through the processing of formal logic, but is instead the self-standing, contentful and internally developing concrete concept of objective necessity. The concrete concept is the singular that contains the universal and the particular in itself, and consequently it is something with the depth of passing through the negation of the negation: “the singularity which it scorns is the depth in which the concept grasps itself and where it is posited as concept.”⁸⁹ But thanks precisely to this concretion and singularity of the concept, “the concept becomes external to itself and steps into actuality.”⁹⁰ That is to say, it then becomes an active, self-differentiating and self-developing subject, which will posit each moment contained inside of

itself as determinations of self-sufficient actuality. Thus, the concept negates itself and loses itself in this self-referring negativity as it enters into judgment. Judgment is the unfolding (or realization) of each moment's interrelation with the other moments inside of the concept. When the different moments of the concept—universality, particularity and singularity—each respectively become a self-sufficient concept unto itself, they combine with the subject and predicate the undetermined concept to the determined concept, but Hegel emphasizes, this “combination of two concepts” is only the external form of judgment. On the surface, though it seems judgment is merely subjectively combining two concepts, or “nouns,” together in external fashion, substantively speaking, this combination is actually still the combination of “originate unity” inside of one identical concept: “judgment is the originate division (or *Teilung*, in German) of an originate unity.”⁹¹ However, in terms of form, judgment ultimately has not explicitly demonstrated this relation of unity inside of the concept, or rather, this unity is the goal that judgment implicitly pursues, so judgment constitutes a movement of development from lower grade to higher grade. “To restore again this identity of the concept, or rather to posit it—this is the goal of the movement of the judgment.”⁹² This movement is the passage of development from immediate “judgment of *existence*” to the mediated “judgment of *reflection*” to the essential “judgment of *necessity*,” and finally, it becomes the subjective “judgment of *the concept*,” at which time the concept recovers and explicitly posits its own unity and thereby transitions into “*sylogistic inference*.” “Thus the syllogism is the completely posited concept; it is, therefore, the rational.”⁹³

At the stage of the sylogistic inference, Hegel similarly opposes “the formalistic view” that regards “the syllogism as merely consisting of three judgments.”⁹⁴ In other words, he treats each relevant form of the syllogism likewise with his sights on the internal unity of the concept in terms of content. Therefore, the necessary connection (rationality) internal to the syllogism is not then similar to Kant's regulative principle of subjective cognition, but is instead the objective nature of the concept or thing in-itself (Hegel held the concrete concept to be the true thing in-itself).⁹⁵ “All things are a syllogism, a universal united through particularity with singularity.”⁹⁶ It then becomes understandable from this, why the development of the syllogism would not enter the fourth type of judgment, “the judgment of the concept,” after passing through “the judgment of existence,” “the judgment of reflection” and “the judgment of necessity,” but would rather immediately transition to the next great stage, that of “objectivity” standing opposite to the whole of “subjectivity.” This is because the purpose of the syllogism's development, although also the immanent unity of the concept (on a higher level), diverges from the purpose of judgment's development, insofar as it not only aims at reaching the human being's subjective understanding of the concrete concept, that is, contemplating the objective unity of the concept from the subjective side, but furthermore aims at viewing the subjective

understanding's concrete concept itself as the law of objective, self-subsistent "being in and for itself," which is to say it aims to sublimate the concept's subjectivity and make it become the unitary law or essence of the objective world, whose objectivity is itself "the *realization* of the concept."⁹⁷ Thus, objectivity ("all things") is, fundamentally speaking, "the syllogistic proof from the concept" that Hegel never explicitly lists among the syllogisms. For instance, he mentions at the very beginning of the section "Objectivity": "Of the concept, we have now first shown that it determines itself as objectivity. It should be obvious that this latter transition is essentially the same as the proof from the concept."⁹⁸ This is namely the "ontological proof" of the existence of God. It should be clear that what Hegel calls objectivity is but the fourth syllogism immediately following "the syllogism of necessity," or "proof from the concept." Therefore, Hegel's "objectivity" is not what we ordinarily call objective existence, but is rather the real concept, the objective concept.⁹⁹ Put otherwise, as Hegel states, "the concept manifests its presence in this externality."¹⁰⁰ It had been first used to prove the objective existence of God, but it means more than just proving existence, insofar as it went beyond simple "being" long ago. Unfolding from the concept, "objectivity has the meaning first of all of the being in and for itself of the concept [...] This immediacy is therefore itself immediately and entirely pervaded by the concept."¹⁰¹ The concept transforms itself into objectivity, which is the concept externalizing itself. When the concept repeatedly develops itself into subjectivity through objective mechanism, chemism and teleology, it subsumes this external being of itself and becomes the Idea.

We already see Hegel's actual usage of the principle of "development" in his concept of a concept developing itself, or developing from subjectivity to objectivity (the other principle he uses the most is that of "the concrete," which we will examine in the next part when we work through "Reflection"). But what is the principle of development in the end? Is there any difference between it and the previously mentioned principle of "a leap" and that of "contradiction"? Hegel is not so explicit in this regard. In the "Introduction" to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he specifically makes a detailed treatment of the concept of development, which is his most explicit treatment, where he combines development with inner teleology from Aristotle onward, which ties together the "implicit" [read: potential—Trans.] with its "actualization," that is, the concepts of "being in-itself and "being for-itself." He reiterates Aristotle's viewpoint here: "Because that which is implicit comes into existence, it certainly passes into change, yet it remains one and the same, for the whole process is dominated by it."¹⁰² For example,

From the germ much is produced when at first nothing was to be seen; but the whole of what is brought forth, if not developed, is yet hidden and ideally contained within itself. The principle of this projection into existence is that the germ cannot remain merely implicit, but is impelled towards development, since it presents the contradiction of being only

implicit and yet not desiring so to be. But this coming without itself has an end in view.¹⁰³

What is implicit has the *I* drive to exist; it wants to exist, to pass over into the form of existence, and only by virtue of this tendency does existence come about.¹⁰⁴

But this development from the seed or germ into the plant is only relatively purposive. The seed at the starting point and the seed at the end point are only the same being in terms of content, while in terms of form they are two individuals external to one another, and consequently, the seed does not truly exist for-itself. Only the development of spirit alone truly exists for-itself, because each stage of development for spirit is "reciprocally for each other." Spirit is therefore the truly active and free subject, whose being at home with self is identical in both form and content alike. "This being-at-home-with-self, or coming-to-self of Mind may be described as its complete and highest end."¹⁰⁵ It cancels out the externality of each moment of itself as different self-subsisting individuals, such that it becomes a fully transparent and inwardly self-consistent substance. "It is in Thought alone that all foreign material disappears from view, and that Mind is absolutely free."¹⁰⁶

Through this we can make out the distinction between the principle of "development" on one hand and that of "a leap" and "contradiction" on the other. When the most fundamental dialectic of the negation of and by itself manifests as "a leap," it is only a "transition" of one category to another (category), and once the transition is completed, the previous category is forgotten (what we ordinarily call "development" mostly stops at the understanding of such a "transition," which is not truly a development). When it manifests as "contradiction," it is likewise only one (category) shining in another category, and when this shining in one another advances to the deeper essence by showing that these two categories are not true essence, the previous two categories are replaced and forgotten by the two categories that follow, so even though essence is already being-in-and-for-itself, "but it is this [being-in-and-for-itself] in the determination of being-in-itself."¹⁰⁷ This is still different from the development of the concept. In brief, even though the leap of existence and the contradiction of essence present the dialectical principle of "the negation of and by itself," they are still blind; they cannot explicitly present the active purposiveness of freedom, insofar as they are still "expositions" in the objective mode of being in-itself, and consequently, they both amount to "objective logic." By contrast, "subjective logic" develops out of the concept, where every moment of the development is organically and purposefully combined in the subject of the concept, where each shows through from beneath a different level, each of them subsisting and freely comprehending its starting point at the end point of development and becoming a true totality that exists in and for itself. Thus, this is the affirmative stage of the actuality of the negation of and by itself becoming aware of itself, when it posits itself

as an absolute principle in (inner) purposiveness, that is, as the principle of “circular” development or of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Of course, the concept is still “incomplete” in simple “subjectivity”:

[I]t must rather be raised to the idea which alone is the unity of the concept and reality; and this is a result which will have to emerge in what follows from the nature of the concept itself. For the reality that the concept gives itself cannot be picked up as it were from the outside but must be derived from the concept itself in accordance with scientific requirements.¹⁰⁸

For this reason, the concept completes itself through “externalizing” what is within itself into objectivity, that is, through turning itself inside out and revealing the concept’s own nature from within the reality that it has extended out of itself. It is this concept that has completed itself which ascends to the Idea.

The Idea is therefore not only the unity of concept and reality but also the unity of subjectivity and objectivity in the concept itself.

The concept, in as much as it has truly attained its reality, is this absolute judgment whose subject distinguishes itself as self-referring negative unity from its objectivity and is the latter’s being-in-and-for-itself; but it refers to it essentially through itself and is, therefore, self-directed purpose and impulse.¹⁰⁹

It becomes the unified subject-object, but this unified Idea again splits into two sides: the subject as “life” unites with the object; the object as “the Idea of cognition” unites with the subject. Worth noting here is that Hegel considers “life” as the first stage of the Idea, which perfectly reflects the existentialist ground in the Hegelian dialectic of the concept. Life here is not animal life or plant life in the biological sense, but is instead spiritual life that embodies the singularity of the human spirit; it is the individual life that is commanded within the reasoning human soul, “enveloped in conceptual form.”¹¹⁰ In this life that is Idea, the concept “is the soul of life itself; it is the impulse that gives itself reality through a process of objectification.”¹¹¹ It is therefore free life, the *soul* of the person, “the initiating self-moving principle.”¹¹² Its movement comes from the negative unity or “impulse” inside of it, and it consequently uses its own organism as instrumental *means* to reach subjective ends. In this very process of living, life experiences the division, contradiction and painful torment in the concept of itself.

Pain is therefore the prerogative of living natures; since they are the concretely existing concept, they are an actuality of infinite power, so that they are in themselves the negativity of themselves, that this their negativity exists for them, that in their otherness they preserve themselves.¹¹³

This self-negation of the living being causes the death of the living individual, but simultaneously, it also causes the reproduction of itself, leading to the sustaining and multiplying of the *species*. When the living soul of the individual passes over into the universal soul of the species (*nous*), life advances to the Idea of cognition, that is, the universal activity of spirit encompassing all of humanity. "The death of the merely immediate, individual living thing [*Lebendigkeit*] is the spirit emerging."¹¹⁴ In other words, the active spirit of *nous* advances by itself into the universal *logos*.

The Idea of cognition also splits into a double movement. On the one hand, it folds the objective world into itself as its content. On the other hand, it also actively reforms the objective world. These movements constitute the idea of theory (the Truth) and the idea of practice (the Good); both of them are the objective purpose for which the Idea's subjective impulse is driven and of which it is in need. In terms of form, the idea of cognition only contains the two moments of theory and practice, and this breaks apart the syllogistic framework of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, which Hegel inveterately employs, but in actuality, the "synthesis" of these two moments coincidentally enters them into the "Absolute Idea" constituting the great syllogistic synthesis for the entire Idea stage, which is to say, the Absolute Idea is both the synthesis of "the Idea" (life—Idea of cognition—Absolute Idea) and also the synthesis of the Idea of cognition (theoretical Idea—practical Idea—Absolute Idea). From this double identity of the Absolute Idea we may also see that the destination point of Hegel's *Logic* is actually the Idea of cognition that has sublated the practical Idea and the spirit of *logos* that has sublated the spirit of *nous*. In this respect, Hegel's entire philosophy is a rationalist system of metaphysical speculation. It is only that the tensions of life are maintained inside of this rational speculation, in which always and everywhere we find the pervasive influence of irrational factors of activity. The spearhead of that negative dialectic shows itself piercing through the strict fixture of a formal framework everywhere.

First of all, Hegel's "Idea of cognition" develops directly out of "the Idea of life," and moreover, what he highlights within the Idea of cognition itself, in "the Idea of truth," is the cognizing subject's "impulse of truth," namely the cognizing subject actively sublating its own subjectivity in the grasping and positing of the objective truth through which it enriches itself and acts to fill itself with content. Cognition is not passively accepting actuality, but is instead purposive action, "[b]ecause cognition is the idea as purpose or as subjective idea, the negation of the world, presupposed as existing in itself, is the first negation." Cognition is firstly the negation of Kant's thing-in-itself, which is the process of the explicit purpose that with full confidence actualizes and realizes itself; "its activity consists in determining the object, and by virtue of this determining to refer itself to itself in it as identical."¹¹⁵ However, this activity of cognition is still at first the external analysis of present objective facts and then the subsequent advance to more active synthesis, which penetrates into the essence (definition) and law (theorem) beneath the

appearance, but as essence and law demonstrate themselves to be no more than objective concept, the concept then demonstrates itself to be no more than the subjective form of objective essence and law. The concept becomes the subject that exists in and for itself; it becomes the idea of practical action. "This idea is superior to the idea of cognition just considered, for it has not only the value of the universal but also of the absolutely actual."¹¹⁶ The practical idea is likewise purposive action; it is the impulse to realize itself, but this time it is no longer striving for its own objectivity (because it already is objective action in itself); it is instead "by means of sublating the determinations of the external world, giving itself reality in the form of external actuality."¹¹⁷ In other words, it is reforming the external world and imprinting it with the mark of personal will. The will to do the good sublates the particularity and the finitude of personal ends through the process of practical execution; it also sublates the mutual externality of ends and means; by seeing within the means, within the mediation of the universal, the infinite progression of the good itself toward the perfection of absolute being in-itself, it transcends the subjective utility and desire of the person and reverts back to "the true." "The idea of the good can therefore find its completion only in the idea of the true."¹¹⁸ The contradictions in the good between the finite and the infinite, and between the end and the means only find resolution when the multiplicity of human beings sees the immanent purpose of historical progress amid the pursuing and fulfilling of external ends and desires; "[a]ccordingly, in this result cognition is restored and united with the practical idea."¹¹⁹ But such a cognition is no longer an investigating cognition, that is, the attempt to realize the identity of subjective and objective while always stopping short at cognition in the splitting of subjective and objective. It is instead cognition that passes the test of practice and truly unifies the subjective and objective split in the subjective activity of the concept, that is, "the cognition of truth." This cognition in which theory and practice are identical is the "Absolute Idea."

The Absolute Idea reverts back to the Idea of cognition, but it similarly reverts back to the first stage of the whole "Idea," that of "life" (the Absolute Idea is "a turning back to life").¹²⁰ We could also say, it is a turning back to the first stage of development among all previous syllogisms big and small, the thesis stage and, ultimately, a turning back to "being" as the beginning of the entire Logic. But why do we say the Absolute Idea, as the third moment, is not a turning back to the second moments of all previous developments? We find the answer in one of Hegel's explanations. He points out, we could always view the first and third determinations as definitions of *absolute*:

[I]t is always just the first simple determination of a sphere that can be so regarded and again the third, the one which is the return from difference to simple self-relation [...] The second determinations, on the other hand, which constitute a sphere in its difference, are the definition of the finite.¹²¹

However, at this point, it is already a turning back to the beginning as pure Idea, pure Form, pure thought or “the thought of thought,” as pure logic and method. We could also say, it is not returning to the beginning as cognition in general (positivist or scientific), but is rather returning as philosophical cognition (philosophy is but methodology). In “the Absolute Idea,” Hegel is mainly defining the moments of the speculative method.¹²² He is defining the model logical structure of his total method. This most general model comes in the following three stages:

- (1) The beginning, that is, being and immediacy, which, from the viewpoint of speculation, is the negation of itself by itself.
- (2) The progression, that is, the beginning’s negation of itself by itself unfolding into the facet of external alienation, but its connection with this facet of alienation is simultaneously its connection with itself; it is the affirmation of the negation of the negation and consequently the progression of one and the same thing.
- (3) Purpose. Precisely for the reason that it is the very progression of one and the same thing, it is therefore the unity of self-negativity in the beginning’s alienating relationship to itself, where the endpoint actualizes the starting point by way of negating the starting point, such that this progression is therefore purposeful progression, which is development.

Development is one and the same thing making itself the purpose of development; it is the progression of it actualizing the implicit content of its own potential. In Hegel’s view, the identical thus understood can be nothing other than the concept. For this reason, the structural model of this logical progression of his is only, at the end of the day, the concept’s own manner of self-movement, which, as the movement of conceptually grasping, culminates at the point of itself grasping (*begreifen*) the concept (*Begriff*) of itself. “The science concludes in this way by grasping the concept of itself as the pure idea, for which the idea is.”¹²³ Clearly in Hegel only the concept enjoys true development, or rather, all things enjoy true development on the sole condition of being understood from the standpoint of the concept. Only the concept, only the Idea that transcends “the present being of all that is,” enables us to grasp that implicit potential that is yet to actualize within the present being, or *determinate being*, of all things and grasp the overall direction of movement and development of the whole amid all of the differences and contradictions. In these two distinct grasps, the concept grasps nothing other than itself; “it is the concept that, on the contrary, will fix its sight on them, move them as their soul and bring out their dialectic.”¹²⁴ Without the concept, inversely, “the subject matter, as it is apart from thought and conceptualization, is a picture representation or also a name; it is in the determinations of thought and of the concept that it *is* what it *is*.”¹²⁵

Hegel depicts this logical formula of the negation of the negation, or of teleology as a “circle,” which is “the line of scientific forward movement.”¹²⁶ Hegel states:

By virtue of the nature of the method just indicated, the science presents itself as a circle that winds around itself, where the mediation winds the end back to the beginning which is the simple ground; the circle is thus a circle of circles, for each single member ensouled by the method is reflected into itself so that, in returning to the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member. Fragments of this chain are the single sciences.¹²⁷

In the *Logic* as pure science and throughout Hegel's whole philosophical system, each fragment of the greater circle is composed out of some set of bigger or smaller circles. Chinese specialists on this “circular” thinking in Hegel have already done rather exhaustive and penetrative research into it.¹²⁸ We will not go into it more here. What remains an open question, however, is the following point: why does Hegel insist on using this very expression, a “circle,” instead of a more precise formulation, which Lenin later proposed, namely a *spiral*?¹²⁹ I think, this reveals a fundamental limitation in Hegel's whole philosophy, which could be interpreted both as the finite nature of his system's external framework as well as the limited nature of his method of subjectivity. Marx says of Hegel's thought:

His thoughts are therefore fixed mental shapes or ghosts dwelling outside nature and man. Hegel has locked up all these fixed mental forms together in his *Logic*, laying hold of them first as negation—that is, as an alienation of human thought—and then as negation of the negation [...] But as even this still takes place within the confines of the estrangement, this negation of the negation is in part the restoring of these fixed forms in their estrangement; in part a stopping-short at the last act—the act of self-reference in alienation—as the true mode of being of these fixed mental forms; and in part, to the extent that this abstraction apprehends itself and experiences an infinite weariness with itself, there makes its appearance in Hegel, in the form of the resolution to recognize nature as the essential being and to go over to intuition, the abandonment of abstract thought—the abandonment of thought revolving solely within the orbit of thought, of thought devoid of eyes, of teeth, of ears, of everything.¹³⁰

Thus, in Hegel, the logical movement of the concept becomes “a pure, *restless* revolving within itself.”¹³¹ In other words, when the concept estranges itself, as it negates itself, it actually never goes beyond itself but stops short within itself, that is, within the subjective brain. In this way, its return back to itself

could be interpreted as a circle closing in on itself, not as an open spiral. Hegel even launched the following accusation at Fichte's philosophy:

The ultimate result is consequently a "circle" which cannot be broken through. The finite spirit must necessarily posit an absolute outside itself (a thing-in-itself), and yet on the other hand it must recognize that this same is only there for it (a necessary noumenon).¹³²

To be sure, Hegel does not differ with Fichte substantively on this point. Where they do differ is that Hegel calls this finite spirit absolute spirit, God. He sees it as the pure subject of all personal sensuous existence. So, when this pure subject externalizes Nature, it does not truly go beyond itself as the concrete act of personal alienation does, but instead merely takes Nature to be the "predicate" of itself, which thus presupposes that this pure subject is a closed loop beyond which nature ultimately can never step. Therefore, the progression is not in the end the infinite advance of a spiral shape, but rather winds back into a cycle; it is a circle in the strictest sense:

Hence, its beginning has a relationship merely to the subject who resolves to philosophize, but not to the science as such. [...] This is even its sole purpose, activity, and goal, namely to attain the concept of its concept, returning to itself and attaining satisfaction in the process.¹³³

Hegel, of course, does ultimately pass over from one circle to another circle, which displays a "development" of logical categories, of nature and of spirit. "The individual circle, simply because it is in itself a totality, also breaks through the boundary of its element and founds a further sphere."¹³⁴ Each individual smaller circle comes with its own gap, or "defect," because of which it passes over into a bigger and fuller circle, but the final whole or concrete totality that is reached no longer has any defect. "This unity is accordingly the absolute and entire truth."¹³⁵ So actually, before this absolute end point is reached in the course of Hegel's thought, the expression that is truly applicable should not be "a circle" but a "spiral," because a circle in the strict sense not only depends on external force but also cannot "break" the limits bounding itself by its own force alone and consequently step outside of itself to "posit a bigger circle." Only a spiral can do this. The representation of the spiral actually already found formulation in Heraclitus, who mentions the example of the screw-press in the fuller's shop to illustrate that the straight is identical to the curved and that the way up and the way down are one and the same.¹³⁶ Hegel claims about himself that "[t]here is no proposition of Heraclitus which I have not adopted in my Logic."¹³⁷ This claim of his is assuredly untrue. Hegel prefers to have every single circle in each and every stage to be "broken" one by one rather than to give up the term "circle." Using the more expedient term "spiral" is preserved for that great, ultimate and absolutely "unbroken" circle, but in fact, that grand circle of logic is

also broken thanks to transitioning over into the philosophy of nature. Then again, by turning back to philosophy of spirit and “absolute spirit,” he posits the circle with even greater firmness.

The representation of the circle is in the first place merely the idea of an infinite cycle, so even though there is infinity as a factor within it, it is still a finite point of view. Hegel opposes this representational image of the “true infinite” to the infinite progression of the straight line, that is, the image of the “bad infinite,” which is brilliant in some respects.¹³⁸ He also raises the problem of the finite’s relation to the infinite up to the fundamental question of whether or not there is still philosophy, which is no less essential, because philosophy is but the grasp of the infinite, which, if impossible to reach within the finite, means true philosophy is impossible as well. However, he forgets that a philosophy which grasps the infinite within the finite must itself be finite and that for a finite philosophy to grasp the infinite, it must at the very least recognize its own finitude, so as to prepare and commit itself to being sublated and consequently leave a gap open in the circle of its own system, or more precisely, see its own system as an open spiral. Now that Hegel see his own philosophy as an “absolute” system that encloses itself, completely present to itself without beginning or end, he cannot escape his destiny to be sublated by a philosophy that he would consider finite, which is also the final destination and ultimate limitation of Hegel’s negative dialectics.

Understanding the true significance and status of the negation of and by itself in Hegel’s dialectic is the crucial problem for understanding the Hegelian dialectic as a whole. No one can claim to have grasped the finer essence of the Hegelian dialectic without having a firm grasp of this problem, which, if ignored, reduces many otherwise meticulous expositions to partial and one-sided statements. In a word, it reduces them to metaphysical or “abstract thoughts”—this is the key point that this book forcefully punctuates. As Marx points out:

Any development, whatever its substance may be, can be represented as a series of different stages of development that are connected in such a way that one forms the *negation* of the other [...] In no sphere can one undergo a development without negating one’s previous mode of existence.¹³⁹

This is a universal principle. “Development” here can only mean a processual chain of negations. In the most basic sense, dialectics could be seen as the doctrine of self-negation, or in other words, the dialectic of the negative is the deepest, innermost source of dialectics. However, even today, the domestic academic world of China still does not consider the dialectic of the negative from the high status it holds as fundamental. Even less depth of analysis is given to the significance of the negation of and by itself. People generally take the principle of negation to be merely the formal principle of the “thesis–antithesis–synthesis” syllogism, placing it on equal footing with quality and quantity transforming into one another and the unity of opposites. Even

worse, they completely deny it is a law of dialectics. At the same time, even when they speak of the negation of negation, they understand it to be the “external” addition of “two negatives,” and almost no one clarifies that it is only one identical “negation of itself,” simply made consistent, made principle. It is simply the result of having to apply negation to itself on principle out of necessity. In this way, all of the components that the dialectic first organically unifies are artificially split apart into a disorganized heap of various principles, theorems, categories and laws, which deadens and sucks the spirit out of dialectical thought.

On the other hand, aside from this formalist distortion of the principle of negation, there is also the tendency to produce formless, irrational and mystical interpretations of it. Some modern Western philosophers have understood Hegel’s dialectic in this way like Theodor Adorno in his book *Negative Dialectic*, in which he turns the negative into a completely lawless impulse driven by pure contingency, a mysterious and consequently incomprehensible drive. He argues philosophy is neither about intellectual intuition nor factual truth. Nothing it says indicates explicit standards about “this is how it is.” Philosophy’s propositions involving conceptualization do not follow standards about the logical state of facts, and its propositions involving facticity likewise do not follow the standards of empirical science.¹⁴⁰ Adorno takes aim at Hegel’s proposition that only the whole is the true, formulating the opposite proposition “the whole is the false,” which cancels out any veracity with logical necessity and turns “negation” into a blind behavior lacking self-awareness and reflexivity (reflection). This behavior seems on the surface to be “formless,” unconstrained and unregulated, but it in fact merely has not become conscious of its own form. Even though Adorno worried about himself falling into irrationalism, he is still just one-sidedly underscoring the irrational side of Hegel’s dialectic. The negation of and by itself as dialectical principle cannot fall prey to formalist interpretations, but this does not mean that it is basically formless, because what is formless cannot become principle. Adorno’s superficial insistence on “the negative” actually nullifies negation as an absolute principle with universal validity, and consequently, it degrades the negative.

For this reason, to truly penetrate and grasp the Hegelian dialectic and sublate from the inside its idealist outer shell so as to rescue its valuable core, aside from revealing the negation of and by itself as the principle of self-negation running through all, one must also research the form of reflection with which Hegel systematically explicates this principle of self-negation. The Hegelian dialectic becomes one fully consistent logical thought and system, a systematically applicable method, and not just a flash or two of dialectical thoughts, thanks to this form of reflection. We could even argue that the principle of negation and that of reflection are the two main elements within Hegel’s dialectic: the former is the content of this dialectic; the latter is its form. Lacking either one of the two, there is no Hegelian dialectic.

Notes

- 1 Engels 1934, 356.
- 2 Engels 1947, 1.13.
- 3 Cited from (Ilyenkov 1989, 74).
- 4 Ilyenkov 1989, 73.
- 5 Ibid., 74.
- 6 Ibid., 79.
- 7 Hegel 1991, 290.
- 8 Ibid., 147.
- 9 Ibid., 152.
- 10 Zhang 1981, 237.
- 11 Hegel 1991, 149.
- 12 Ibid., 165.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., 153; italics in original.
- 15 Hegel 2010, 127.
- 16 Hegel 1991, 158.
- 17 Ibid., 150.
- 18 Engels 1974, 257; italics in original.
- 19 Hegel 2010, 299.
- 20 Ibid., 296.
- 21 Hegel 1991, 148.
- 22 Ibid., 166.
- 23 Ibid., 173; italics in original.
- 24 Hegel 2010, 202.
- 25 Ibid., 203; italics in original.
- 26 Ibid., 203.
- 27 Hegel 2010, 324.
- 28 Hegel 1991, 173.
- 29 Zhang 1981, 271.
- 30 Hegel 2010, 334.
- 31 Hegel 1991, 174.
- 32 Hegel 2010, 333.
- 33 Hegel 1991, 174.
- 34 Ibid., 174.
- 35 Hegel 2010, 338.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Engels 2006, 357.
- 38 Lenin 2003, 357.
- 39 Kiselyov 1956, 6.
- 40 Lenin 2003, 85–237.
- 41 Ibid.; italics in original.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.; italics and bold in original.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., italics and bold in original.
- 46 Kun 1980, 33.
- 47 Ibid., 27.

- 48 Ibid., 28.
- 49 Hegel 2010, 346.
- 50 Ibid., 338.
- 51 Ibid., 339.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Hegel 2010, 357.
- 54 Ibid., 358.
- 55 Fulda 1978, 155.
- 56 Hegel 2010, 361.
- 57 Ibid., 366.
- 58 Ibid., 365.
- 59 Ibid., 378.
- 60 Ibid., 140.
- 61 Hegel 1991, 187.
- 62 Hegel 2010, 382.
- 63 Jiang 1981, 466.
- 64 See (Hegel 2010, 382).
- 65 Wang 1974, vol. 4.
- 66 Hegel 2010, 745.
- 67 Ibid., 377.
- 68 Ibid., 417.
- 69 Marx 2000, pt. 2, ch.1.
- 70 Hegel 2010, 422.
- 71 Ibid., 437.
- 72 Ibid., 468.
- 73 Ibid., 466.
- 74 Ibid., 468.
- 75 Ibid., 490.
- 76 Ibid., 488.
- 77 Hegel 1991, 230.
- 78 Ibid., 233.
- 79 Ibid., 234.
- 80 Hegel 2010, 511.
- 81 Ibid., 512.
- 82 Ibid., 512.
- 83 Ibid., 520.
- 84 Ibid., 523.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid., 526.
- 87 Ibid., 527.
- 88 Ibid., 507.
- 89 Ibid., 546.
- 90 Ibid., 548.
- 91 Ibid., 552.
- 92 Ibid., 556.
- 93 Ibid., 588; *italics in original*.
- 94 Ibid., 592.
- 95 Ibid., 649.
- 96 Ibid., 593.

- 97 Hegel 2010, 626; italics in original.
- 98 Hegel 2010, 625.
- 99 Ibid., 689.
- 100 Ibid., 578.
- 101 Ibid., 630.
- 102 Hegel 1892, 75.
- 103 Ibid., 76.
- 104 Hegel 2009, 51.
- 105 Hegel 1892, 77.
- 106 Ibid., 78.
- 107 Hegel 2010, 334.
- 108 Ibid., 518.
- 109 Ibid., 673.
- 110 Ibid., 677.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Ibid., 680.
- 113 Ibid., 684.
- 114 Hegel 1991, 290.
- 115 Hegel 2010, 699.
- 116 Ibid., 729.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Ibid., 732.
- 119 Ibid., 734.
- 120 Ibid., 735.
- 121 Hegel 1991, 135.
- 122 Hegel 2010, 300.
- 123 Hegel 1991, 303.
- 124 Hegel 2010, 744.
- 125 Ibid., 743; italics in original.
- 126 Ibid., 49.
- 127 Hegel 2010, 751.
- 128 See for reference, (Zhang 1981, 159–97).
- 129 See for reference, (Lenin 2003, 357–61)
- 130 Marx & Engels 1988, 164–5.
- 131 Ibid., 162; italics in original.
- 132 Lauer & Hegel, 1983, pt. 3.
- 133 Hegel 1991, 45.
- 134 Ibid., 43.
- 135 Ibid., 299.
- 136 Ye 1998, 119–20.
- 137 Hegel 1892, 279.
- 138 Hegel 2010, 119.
- 139 Marx 1976, 317; italics in original.
- 140 See (Xu 1980, 89).



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Part II

The form of the Hegelian dialectic

Reflection

Through the treatment given in the previous chapter, we already see that the thought of negativity in the Hegelian dialectic makes up the inner soul of all movement and development. However, comprehending just the principle of negation alone is not enough to grasp the whole truth of the Hegelian dialectic. The *soul* must receive physical shape from the body for it to have the capacity to truly live and play any role. Hegel himself argued when mentioning the proposition “all determination is negation”:

That determinateness is negation posited as affirmative is Spinoza’s proposition: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, a proposition of infinite importance. Only, negation as such is formless abstraction. However, speculative philosophy must not be accused of taking negation or nothing as an ultimate: negation is as little an ultimate for it as reality is for it the truth.¹

Then what finally counts as “an ultimate” for philosophy? Hegel never explains. But, now that he has presented negation as “formless abstraction,” it also implies that negation still needs to impart itself with concrete form, and this concrete form is a return to the beginning affirmation, an affirmation; it is the determination (affirmation) of having undergone negation and the negation of the negation, or rather, it is the form of the “boundless” negation “bounding” itself with the determinate form, through which alone philosophy can come to completion. This form is the form of reflection that is uniquely Hegel’s. It is, of course, not added to negation from outside of it, but is rather the inherent property of negation itself. As we have already argued, negation is, truthfully speaking, “the negation of itself,” which is also to say, negation as a universal principle is reflexive in-itself. Only the negation that returns back to itself is truly consistent negation. In this sense, negation is the essence of reflection, while reflection is the expression of self-negation. The history of philosophy circles of China were blind to Hegel’s concept of reflection for a considerable period of time, until recently, when some preliminary studies finally began to appear, notably: Yang Shoukan’s *Preliminary Investigation of Hegel’s Doctrine of Reflection* (in *Collected Works on the History of*

Western Philosophy, Sanlian Books, 1979); Zhang Shiyong's *Translator's Commentary on Hegel's Minor Logic* (Appendix to *Hegel on Reflection*, in *On the Philosophies of Kant and Hegel*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981); Wang Jiuxing and Wang Shuren's *The Rational Core of "Essentiality or Reflective Determination" in Hegel* (in *Collected Theses on Hegel's Philosophy*, Fujian People's Publishing House, 1981). That being said, these studies still only explore the dialectical content that the concept of reflection expresses from the restricted lens of the actual application of the concept of "reflection" in the "Doctrine of Essence" of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. While this content ranges from the unity of opposites to the negation of the negation and more, reflection itself as a universal form of expression of the Hegelian dialectic seems still beyond people's horizon. Reflection is, of course, inseparable from its content. From our point of view, this mainly means reflection is nothing but an expression of the negation of and by itself, or one way in which the negation of negation is expressed. When we spoke about the circular formula of development and logical model of thought in the previous chapter, we touched on the concrete determination of the form that reflection takes in Hegel. In the theme we are about to discuss, we shall also frequently return to the relationship between reflection and negativity, and portray it as the unity of the spirit of *logos* and the spirit of *nous*. However, the chief purpose of this part is to explain reflection as the form of the Hegelian dialectic and to clarify what characteristics it has. We will also illustrate this point with respect to three areas, the significance of the concept of "reflection," its relationship to reason and its normative logical function in the Hegelian dialectic.

Note

- 1 Hegel 2010, 87.

4 The conceptual intension of reflection

The cultural background of Hegel's concept of reflection

For Chinese people, who lack a reflective tradition, understanding Hegel's concept of reflection first requires the clarification of this concept's cultural background. We explained in Volume 1 that the concept of *logos* in ancient Greek philosophy emerges as the result of the ancient Greeks undertaking the inversion of language, an inversion that brought about a fundamental turnaround in the relationship between word and meaning and the object it indicates, its signified (to use the terminology of Chinese philosophy, this is the relationship between "names and substances"): this relationship is not one of the word reflecting and corresponding to its object, but is instead one of the object reflecting and corresponding to the word and the universal relations of language. This is akin to a mirror in general, in which the reflection is not that of the mirror's own substance, but is instead that of the very subject projected into the mirror. Heraclitus insists, "[t]o the soul belongs the *logos* which augments itself."¹ He also holds all things to come into being on the basis of this *logos*. Pythagoras asserts, "words are the winds of the soul; the soul is the element articulated into words; it is indivisibly bonded with words."² At the same time, he also (as Iamblichus said) "thought the first principle and that which is thought to be one and the same thing, insisting that number and *logos* is the first principle, which runs through connecting and uniting the nature of everything, endowing everything with order."³ In contrast, "the unlimited entity is unscientific and we cannot write down any good definition of it."⁴ Parmenides argues, "the thinkable object and the object thought are identical. Without the objects of thought signified by words, there would then be no act of thought at all."⁵ Plato holds the objective thing to be the "copy" of the Idea and holds "all learning to be nothing more than the recalling [of Ideas]." The Christianity of the Middle Ages imagines God to have created the entire world *ex nihilo* with his word. All of this contains the thought of "reflection" inside of it already. Descartes's famous "meditations" are actually but the "reflection" of thought, for which reason some brought forth the following accusation around his time:

Although the human mind, when it turns in on itself, does not perceive itself to be anything apart from a thinking thing, it does not follow that its nature or “essence” consists purely in its being a thinking thing, “purely,” that is, in a sense that would exclude everything else that might perhaps be said to belong to its nature.⁶

However, although there is one thread of continuous transmission between reflection in modern subjective thought and those reflections on the objective object (and God) in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, there are also major differences. That is, the former considers the essences of external objects to be the subject, while the latter considers the subject as an internal object. However, it should be clear that the former kind of reflection already implicitly contains in-itself the latter kind of reflection, because when one considers the essence of objects to be the external subject (or the subject’s “other being”), one is effectively already viewing the internal subject to be an external object. For example:

Aristotle was the first to say that νοῦς is the thought of thought. The result is the thought which is at home with itself, and at the same time embraces the universe, and transforms it into an intelligent world [...] withdraws into itself, and in its various aspects develops the Absolute into a totality, in order, by the very process of so doing, to become conscious of itself in its unity, in Thought.⁷

Now, we only need to sublimate this double externality of consciousness to reach the internal reflection of the modern age. This is self-consciousness. Since what we call self-consciousness, as Hegel has clarified, is at once both consciousness whose object is itself and consciousness whose self is the object, it is itself consciousness “doubled.”

Therefore, even though philosophers already advanced to levels of reflective thought when thought in ancient Greece transcended the sensuous material world and ascended to higher universality, they never detached from the objective externality of such reflection and did not consider reflection itself as the object of thought. For this reason, the first rational philosopher of Greece, Pythagoras, who strictly speaking only counts as half rational, seems to have already mentioned the “reflective” action of the rational soul (Laertius 2015, 596): “when [the soul] is strong and settled down into itself, reasonings and deeds become its bonds.” Aristotle also presented “the thought of thought,” but the penetrating examination of this reflexive thought was the work of modern philosophy, predominantly that of modern epistemology. John Locke divides the sources of all human knowledge into two kinds in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: the first is ideas of sensation (impressions); the other is ideas of reflection obtained “from the inward operations of [our own] minds about [outward sensible perceptions].”⁸ These ideas of reflection involve the different operations of our minds like

perceiving, thinking, doubting, believing, inferring, knowing, desiring and so on, but have nothing to do with external things. It should be clear that reflection for Locke is the same as “meditation” for Descartes, in whom we also see meditation involves closing your eyes, blocking your ears and ignoring the other senses altogether to inwardly consider solely what is inside yourself.⁹ In Descartes this is for the sake of discovering from it the ultimate ground and beginning of all knowledge, while for Locke ideas of reflection presuppose sense impressions, as the human mind is originally a *tabula rasa*. However, for Locke, those the operations of the human mind that the ideas of reflection show may actively assemble those acquired simple ideas into complex ideas (like “substance”) and can make all of the different simple or complex ideas in the human mind construct a system of mutual correspondence, that is, of “scientific knowledge.” The only problem is that it is unknowable whether or not such knowledge reflects the “real essence” of the substance; it only expresses the “nominal essence” of things. For this reason, Locke meticulously examines the role of names and language. He strictly confines the ancient *logos* to the scope of nominalism, demoting it to the level of signification and the naming of sensible things:

We should find, in all languages, the names which stand for things that fall not under our senses to have had their first rise from sensible ideas. By which we may give some kind of guess what kind of notions they were, and whence derived, which filled their minds who were the first beginners of languages.¹⁰

That is to say, words do not have their own self-standing, regular signification: “[words] came to be made use of by men as the sign of their ideas [...] by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea.”¹¹ The identity of a word’s signification is shaped merely by convention for the sake of communicating people’s thoughts and ideas. Locke cancels out the reverse functioning of words, attributing such inversions to nothing more than the requirements of subjective applicability. The necessary trend of this thought is David Hume’s extreme form of empiricism, which inevitably cancels out all scientific knowledge as such and falls into skepticism and the doctrine of unknowability.

Kant’s critical philosophy is also in substance “reflective” philosophy in the near Lockean sense, because he holds to critically examining (reflecting on) cognitive capacities prior to cognition. Although the spirit of *logos* is already recovered in his transcendental logic by means of the “human being legislating for Nature” (and no longer conventionally shaping it), it is still considered to be knowledge solely about “phenomena” standing in opposition to the unknowable thing in-itself.¹² However, the “reflection” that Kant explicitly presents differs somewhat from that in Locke: Lockean reflection falls entirely within the subjective limits of human knowledge: “knowledge [...] cannot exceed [our ideas].”¹³ Kantian reflection attempts to make communicate phenomenal

knowledge and practical noumena. In the *Critique of Pure Judgment*, Kant presents two sorts of *reflective judgment*: one is aesthetic judgment through the human being's experience of subjective mentality, that is, aesthetic appreciation or aesthetic regard, whereby we discover in the human being the a priori principle of universal freedom, for the reason that beauty inspires through the person's free activity a feeling of pleasure that humanity shares in common (a universally communicable feeling), whence it becomes a symbol of morality; the other is teleological judgment, which discovers in Nature the existence of an intrinsic teleological tendency through the human being's experience of objective nature, that is, the experience of natural organisms all the way up to the internal correspondences immanent to the entire cosmos; ultimately it is the tendency toward interhuman morality. Thus, judgment is not just the determination of knowledge about phenomena; it is also applicable to the transcendent world of freedom and morality. But for Kant, such judgment can only be "reflective thought," which always plays some "determining" role in the developmental tendency of nature and the mental life of humanity alike. It cannot become true knowledge; it is only symbolic, implicitly hinting at the moral substance of the transcendent, for which reason it ultimately boils down to an indeed grounded speculation at one's own underlying substance through subjective experience. Clearly, for Kant, the word "reflection" is paired in opposition to that of determination, whereas Hegel goes on to propose the term "determining reflection." Determining judgment involves regulating singular empirical representations with preexisting categories of abstract thought in order to construct knowledge, while reflective judgment involves finding universal principles for pre-given singular experiences, which is not knowing, but merely acts of free harmony proceeding among all of one's cognitive faculties. People may look upon this principle of subjective activity analogically and symbolically as the principle of the transcendent world of the thing in-itself, but cannot consider this viewpoint as truth, not as the noumenal law of the world that we cognize. Even though we can tell from this that Kant already began the transcendence over the internality of subjective experience, he still limited himself to the reflective thought of the inner mind. His harmonization of cognition and practice, of phenomena and noumena are unsuccessful, fictitious. Hegelian reflection grows up precisely on this foundation of the traditional reflective spirit. In his view, from the modern age to Kant himself, that internal sort of subjective reflection is but an "external" reflection of the objective logical thing in-itself. Such reflection cannot penetrate the objective concept's self-moving essence, but instead stops as the present experience of abstract subjective acts of thought:

The opposition of positive and negative is normally taken in the sense that the former (even though its name conveys positedness) is to be supposed as objective; the latter, instead, as something subjective that only belongs to an external reflection and has nothing to do with what exists objectively in and for itself, even is for the latter nothing at all.¹⁴

Hegel, on the contrary, insists that true reflection ought to be the reversal of this subjectivity and the viewing of language and logic as the first, objective noumenon of the world. This sort of reflection in Hegel could be called a one-time full recovery of the ancient Greek spirit of *logos*, but it already consciously injects the internal reflection and self-consciousness of modern subjectivity into this *logos*, turning it into a simultaneously internal and objective subject-object unity. Hegel's entire *Logic* explores precisely such a subjective-objective relationship. That is, the objective entity showing itself as nothing more than the inversion of the subjective concept is how the subjective concept inverts into objective being.

After Hegel, although people have come at his practice of inversion here with criticism from several different angles, this reflective tradition of the linguistics *logos* still permeates contemporary Western philosophy in all kinds of ways. It not only continues to manifest the tendency of nominalism in the logical positivism of linguistic analytic philosophy, but it also manifests in the modern hermeneutic view of language. As Gadamer puts it:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it [...] All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists.¹⁵

This idea is typically “Hegelian.” Western philosophical thought's deep-rooted tradition of focusing on the *logos* of language to reflect on and retrace the underlying substance of being by aid of language cannot be shaken off by the event of one “turn.”

Now, we can see the absence of any similar counterpart to this deep and far-reaching cultural background surrounding Hegel's concept of reflection within the Chinese tradition of philosophy. Ancient Chinese philosophy took as problematic themes the differentiation of names and substances (*mingshi zhi bian* 名实之辩) and the differentiation of wording and meaning (*yanyi zhi bian* 言意之辩), which divorced the Chinese tradition from any inversion from the very beginning. The traditional ancient Chinese focus on actual relevance and pragmatic application always stood opposed to abstract speculations divorced from the facts of immediate experience. The Chinese clung stubbornly to the rich and colorful yet contingent variety of empirical facts and saw language as merely names and wordings of these empirical facts (substances). Even when people accepted there being laws that transcend experience (*dao* 道 and principle *li* 理), such laws did not need to be expressed with language and logic, but only required immediate bodily experiences with the affective mind (*xin* 心), lived experiences in which language and

logic are by no means necessary tools but are rather redundant obstacles, and true knowledge involves learning how to remove these obstacles. The Chinese doctrines of “returning to the root and restoring the source” (*fanben huanyuan* 反本还原) and “recovering the unmodified substance and reverting back to the raw truth” (*fanpu guizhen*) by no means involved any sense of “reflecting” but, on the contrary, cutting out all artificial reflective activity. In this way, it led to Chinese people running into serious difficulties when seeking to understand Western “reflection” (*fansi* 反思) from the perspective of their own native tradition. Most obviously, people think that to fully refute a Western philosopher’s theory of reflection, it is enough to just point out that he “flips names upside down into substances,” entangles himself in “abstract concepts” and “speculation,” and splits apart names from things. This sort of refutation basically goes no further than ancient thought’s refutation of the pre-Qin school of nominalism, and as a result it still restricts people’s thought to the narrow baseline of immediate experience and pragmatism. With no genuine interest in either the self-standing sense of language itself or the strict rules of logical thought, with only inadequate power to think about the many levels of universals and of concepts along with the system interconnecting them, this standpoint cannot secure all-around and precise understanding. In actuality, the inversion of the relation between names and substances that the Western doctrine of reflection conducts does not necessarily result in idealism. In fact, some ancient Greek philosophers who champion *logos* with a determinate theory, like Heraclitus, are considered materialists. In the modern era, Spinoza also joins these ranks (he is often called an “exception,” because people generally feel perplexed at the “strange” combination of rationalism or logicism with materialism). Such materialists are even more profound and superior in degree of thought than those materialists championing narrow empiricism. Of course, inveterately clinging to the effect of reflective thought without knowing (or being able to find) a pathway to once again invert the inverted relationship back around is an obvious shortcoming leading to idealism, but rejecting the reflective inversion altogether leads no less directly into idealism. On the contrary, it may even slide into more narrow and extreme forms of idealism (a case in point is Hume, whose subjective idealism is the result of passing through rigorous reflection that is the result of carrying logical deduction to the end, which is a breed of pure empiricism that cannot be found in ancient Chinese either). Marx posits the alternative, dialectical materialism, by once again reversing the Hegelian inversion, but this reinverting is not simply “weeding out the mess and restoring order” or “returning to the roots and reverting back to the original state”; it is rather sublating. Hegel’s reversal was a necessary moment that humanity’s philosophical thought had to go through; it was a needed lesson for thought, without which the Hegelian dialectic would remain beyond human understanding and for that matter the materialist dialectic would too.

So, what is reflection in the end?

The general sense of reflection

Reflection, coming from the Latin word *reflexion*, originally signified the optical event of reflecting light. When light runs into an object that reflects light, light is reflected back in the direction it came, or it alters its original direction according to the angle of its propagation. Here, the motion of light itself is clearly the reflecting subject, while the reflective thing [that reflects the light] is the [reflecting subject's] subject matter, that is, the object. However, after light is reflected, its image is altered. For instance, in the mirror, the left side turns into the right side and the front side becomes the back side, while the back becomes the front. Even so, the image in the mirror is still the image of you and is not the image of the mirror (the reflective object) itself; it is only that this image has taken the pathway of inversion just like your face appears backward (and not as your face is forward) in the mirror. This is precisely what Locke means when he uses such terms to address those "ideas of reflection" that the mind acquires when it "comes to reflect on its own operations about the ideas got by sensation."¹⁶ These ideas of reflection are not images of a human being's sensations but images produced by the human mind itself. The mind is like a lamp [emitting light] and a human being's ideas of sensation are like mirrors that reflect the lamp light, from where the mind gets to know its own being, but as to what the substance of the mind ultimately is, the mind cannot know by itself alone, because the mind can only come to know itself through the images of itself reflected in mirrors. These very images, however, are altered and inverted thanks precisely to being reflected, owing to which they are degraded resemblances of the mental substance. Kant's "reflective judgment" is basically identical to Locke's according to this understanding of reflection, but the difference is, even though Kant believes the mental substance (the thing in-itself) is indeed altered by reflection's processing of it into images, such images at least retain some evidence of the source, allowing one to at least guess what the source is from what are not completely false images and ungrounded representations. He insists "freedom" produces such indubitable evidence, for although freedom itself is a transcendent Idea, it is also a practical "fact" at the same time. Through actual moral conduct, human beings already prove that human beings are capable of obeying not the necessary laws of natural forces but the moral laws of human self-regulation.¹⁷ In reflective judgment, human beings also discover, furthermore, that when they appreciate beauty and make teleological judgments about nature, they may freely employ their own cognitive faculties and by activating the free, harmonious exercise of these cognitive faculties in accordance with their own passionate interests, they can get such experiences a priori that are neither cognitive events nor moral deeds, but have both social universality and moral symbolism. This provides concrete proof of combining freedom with necessity in experience and gives people a direction that is both trustworthy and worthwhile for getting to know the free substance of what they are in-themselves.

Hegel's concept of reflection is in its most basic sense still taken from the traditional meaning of it. He mentions in the *Lesser Logic* §122:

The term "reflection" is primarily used of light, when, propagated rectilinearly, it strikes a mirrored surface and is thrown back by it. So we have here something twofold: first, something immediate, something that is, and second, the same as mediated or posited. And this is just the case when we reflect on an object or "think it over" (as we also say very often). For here we are not concerned with the object in its immediate form, but want to know it as mediated. And our usual view of the task or purpose of philosophy is that it consists in the cognition of the essence of things. By this we understand no more than that things are not to be left in their immediate state, but are rather to be exhibited as mediated or grounded by something else. The immediate being of things is here represented as a sort of rind or curtain behind which the essence is concealed.¹⁸

In this passage, we can see that when Hegel leads into his epistemology with this analogy of light reflecting back, he retains the traditional sense of reflection on the one hand, and also goes beyond those inner subjective limitations, those limitations of sensuous experience in both Locke and Kant, on the other hand. For Hegel, the essential, the substantial, is not forever concealed from us by dint of us only seeing images of it (and not the thing in-itself); on the contrary, with the evidence of these images at hand, we can "think it over" (*Nachdenken*), which is to say, we can use thought (*denken*) to go after (*nach*) that ground or essence behind the images just as we follow images in the mirror to inversely track down (uncover) the substance of them. Furthermore, all that is essential, fundamental or substantial can only become graspable for people through their reflections, and what people grasp is nothing other than the essence of their own thought, that is, the concept. In this sense, reflection (*fanying* 反映) is a thinking back over (*Nachdenken*), a "reversing back over in thought" (*fansi* 反思).

We have to explain here that the German word *Nachdenken* is often rendered *houxi* 后思 [afterthought], which is inaccurate. The key is in understanding the first half of the composite, "*nach*." In German, *nach* is a preposition with three basic senses: (1) going toward or directed at something; (2) after something [in time]; (3) according to, based on something. In a compound word, it correspondingly has three senses as well: (1) activity for a purpose; (2) the act of following behind [after something]; (3) the act of copying and repeating [after something]. Using *houxi* (afterthought) to translate *Nachdenken* only fits the second sense, but places the first and third senses out of consideration. In fact, *Nachdenken* is an everyday word (for instance, it was included in the publication *Everyday German Vocabulary* (*deyu changyong cihui* 德语常用词汇), Commercial Press, 1956), and in common usage it does not have the meaning of thinking "after something [takes place]" but simply means sinking into deeper thought, deeply considering and thinking over something

to get to the bottom of it, which is to say, *Nachdenken* involves the first and third senses of *nach-*, not the second sense. Hegel uses the term *Nachdenken* precisely in this common sense of the word, but he also employs it in the more popular usage in the *Lesser Logic* like in the passage above, where he says, “[a]nd this is just the case when we reflect on an object or ‘think it over’ (as we also say very often).” Here, “think it over” explicitly shows his reference to the ordinary meaning of *Nachdenken*, that is, reflecting on something to get to the bottom of it, that is, the essence underneath the phenomenal appearances. It could also be translated as *fanfu sikao* 反复思考 (repeatedly thinking over), but keep in mind that this is not going back and forth between the factual state of affairs and its ground over and over, but is instead turning back from the factual state of affairs toward the causal ground, that is, referring to and questioning after (*nach*) its ground; it is not passively “tailing” behind already accomplished empirical facts, but is instead actively and purposefully pursuing the essence and ground. In connection with *Reflexion*, *Nachdenken* means following the trajectory of light reflecting back at what is opposite to the appearance (the image) in search after its ground, whereby you discover the object is nothing more than the reflection of light (thought) itself in another (*die Reflexion des Denkens in anderes*); it is “thinking-over” (*Nachdenken*, *fansi* 反思); it is “reflective thought that has *thoughts* as such as its *content* and brings them to consciousness.”¹⁹ What Hegel originally means is explicitly clear. *Nachdenken* is reflection. There is no serious distinction between the two (even though they differ both etymologically in stem and original sense). *Nachdenken* is a German word whose emphasis is on a Cartesian-like meditation of inwardly probing the very ground in thought; reflection is a Latin word whose emphasis is on the reflexivity of that very meditation’s search for the ground: “the task of philosophy consists just in tracing things back to thoughts, and to determine thoughts at that.”²⁰ At the same time, there is evidence showing how Hegel’s *Nachdenken* may for literal reasons have given rise to “afterthought,” that is, “a consideration that follows after the fact.” It comes precisely from taking up the critical attitude of the finite thought of the understanding, which includes both empirical science and immediate knowledge (as in Kant and Jacobi). For instance, Hegel criticizes the general understanding of scientific education and immediate knowledge, arguing:

But philosophy itself experiences its worst fate at the hands of those enemies when they deal with it directly themselves, both interpreting it and passing judgment on it. It is the factum of the physical or spiritual, but especially of religious vitality too, that is misshaped through the reflection that is incapable of grasping it. For itself, however, this interpreting has the sense of raising the factum for the first time into something-known, and the difficulty lies in this passage from the matter to cognition that is produced by meditating upon it. In science itself, this difficulty is no longer present. For the factum of philosophy is cognition already elaborated; so the interpreting can only be a “thinking-over” in

the sense that it is a further thinking that comes later. Only critical evaluation would require a “thinking-over” in the ordinary meaning of the word.²¹

What follows is a whole long paragraph discussing the “express” contradiction between “interpretation” (*Auffassen*) and “judgment” (*Beurteilung*).

Considered in connection with the whole of Hegel’s thought, there is no way Hegel would advocate such “afterthought” following after the fact, for he insists on the opposite viewpoint so many times. For instance, he argues:

If mediation is one-sidedly stressed and made into a condition, then we can say that philosophy owes its first beginning to experience (to what is a posteriori).—But that is not saying very much, for thinking is in fact essentially the negation of something immediately given—just as we owe our eating to food because without it we could not eat. It is true that, in this context, eating is represented as ungrateful, since it is the digesting of that to which it is supposed to owe itself. In this sense, thinking is no less ungrateful.²²

This for the reason that in philosophical thinking, the relationship is reversed: “the assumption of this content, through which the immediacy that still clings to it, and its givenness, are sublated by thinking, is at the same time a developing of thinking out of itself.”²³ This is “what is a priori” in thinking, which although it is inseparable from empirical data, by no means follows after the empirical fact. I think that reflective thought (either as *Reflexion* or *Nachdenken*) in Hegel always refers to “pondering in reverse” or the reflexive thinking of self-consciousness (Descartes’s “meditation”); this is its most general significance, which covers abstract understanding no less than speculative reason. It could be used both in the derogatory sense (as “subjective reflection,” “abstract reflection,” “external reflection,” the reflection of the understanding etc.) and in the commendatory sense as follows:

The reflection already mentioned consists in transcending the concrete immediate, in determining and parting it. But this reflection must equally transcend its separating determinations and above all connect them. The conflict of determinations breaks out precisely at the point of connection. This reflective activity of connection belongs in itself to reason, and to rise above the determinations and attain insight into their discord is the great negative step on the way to the true concept of reason.²⁴

In *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, Hegel pointed out that “thinking-over elevates itself to reason when it sublates the finite and reduces itself to understanding when it holds reasoning back in opposition.”²⁵ The general meaning of thinking-over (*Nachdenken*) is not thinking about the content in sensations and representations over and over

again after the fact of something happening, but is instead transcending the sensation and representation, viewing them as merely inverted reflections of the essence and consequently looking back from the representation to its essence (in thought and concept). This reverse going back over in thought is “thinking over.” *Nachdenken* is therefore thought going beyond the world of sensation in pursuit of the supersensible world:

The elevation of thinking above the sensible, its going out above the finite to the infinite, the leap that is made into the supersensible when the sequences of the sensible are broken off, all this is thinking itself; this transition is only thinking.²⁶

But this supersensible world is itself divided into two levels as well, that of the understanding and that of reason (for information on the doctrine about the first and second supersensible worlds, see the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). At the reflective stage of the understanding, thinking again treats the essence (the concept) as finite determinations externally alongside one another, not unlike sensible things, just as Descartes treats the cogito as the substance of a finite soul or Kant treats self-consciousness and the thing in-itself as two mutually unrelated spheres. This sort of reflection, though, goes beyond the finitude of sensation and representation in general (and so is also reflective thought), and it also slides right into another kind of finitude, which is that of thought-determinations. Thus, from the methodological perspective, it has not truly transcended the limits of empiricism. Only by reaching the reflective stage of reason can thinking understand thought-determinations through the self-movement of the concept and concrete concept, that is, through the active power of synthetic unification, and view them as not being restricted from the outside, as the inner soul of moving development in all things. Hegel states:

Insofar as it aims at satisfying this need, meditative thinking is the thinking that is philosophical in the proper sense, [i.e., it is] speculative thinking. Hence, as a meditation, which in all its community with that first [empirically scientific] meditation is at the same time diverse from it, philosophical thinking has its own peculiar forms, apart from the forms that they have in common. The universal form of it is the Concept.²⁷

Hereafter we no longer distinguish between the two different articulations of reflective thought (*Reflexion* and *Nachdenken*), because the distinction is not between the words expressing reflective thought but between the general sense and the two different particular senses of reflective thinking (the understanding and reason). It should be clear, the general sense of reflection or the form of reflection “they have in common” involves thinking back over in reverse, thanks to which (reflectiveness and reflexiveness) it proves its own activity. In Hegel’s view, thinking as such is active, and consequently, reflection is the essence of all thought; it is thinking *as such* or “the thought

of thought.” In the section “*The Science of Logic: Preliminary Conception*,” in the *Encyclopaedia*, aside from critiquing thought’s three attitudes toward objectivity, Hegel works mainly with the concept of reflection or thinking as such from the very beginning. He explicates it into four levels: (1) thinking as the activity of the universal, “[t]hinking represented as a *subject* is that which *thinks ...*”²⁸ It is “when thinking is taken as active with regard to objects, as the *thinking-over* of something.”²⁹ Hence, (2) the product of the act of thinking, the universal, contains the crux of the matter, the essential, the inner, the true; “we must first *think it over* in order to arrive at the genuine constitution of the object, and that by thinking it over this [goal] is indeed achieved.”³⁰ (3) “Thinking it over *changes* something in the way in which the content is at first [given] in sensation, intuition, or representation.”³¹ “At first glance, to be sure, this seems to stand things on their heads, and to run counter to the proper purpose of cognition,” but “what is substantial is only reached through the reworking of the immediate by our thinking about it.”³² (4) “It is equally the case that in this *thinking-over* the genuine nature [of the object] comes to light, and that this thinking is *my* activity, this true nature is also the *product of my* spirit, [of me] as thinking subject.”³³ Therefore, thinking the matter over is self-consciousness or consciousness becoming aware of itself in the object; “it is only our philosophical reflection that makes [the ‘I’] a subject matter of inquiry. In the ‘I,’ we have thought present in its complete purity. Animals cannot say ‘I’; no, only man can do so, because he *is* thinking itself.”³⁴ We could summarize the four points above in the following manner: (1) reflective thought is active; (2) by reflectively thinking the matter over (and only by doing so), the truth of the matter comes to light; (3) thinking-over turns the immediate, the representation, upside down; (4) thinking the object over returns from the object to itself as thought; it is self-consciousness. In sum, reflectively thinking-over is philosophical thought; it is pure thinking in-itself.

Clearly, when Hegel sees the *Logic* as having “to do with pure thought or with the pure thought-determinations,”³⁵ he is viewing reflective thought as the subject matter of the entire *Logic*. In the *Science of Logic*, the first category, “pure being,” and its immediate identity with “pure nothing” is “reflectionless,” and “[t]his reflectionless being is being as it immediately is only within.”³⁶ The final category, “the Absolute Idea” sublates “the determinations of reflection” thanks to reverting back to concrete immediacy and becoming “the creator of nature.”³⁷ Yet, he also states, “[i]n the pure reflection of the beginning as it is made in this *Logic* with being as such, the transition is still hidden,”³⁸ and moreover, “[s]imple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection; it refers to the distinction from what is mediated.”³⁹ So, considering the *Science of Logic* in connection with the whole of Hegel’s system, it is a reflective system from beginning to end. In addition, all concepts and categories arguably move through reflection and forms thereof in the same way that they move owing to the negation of and by itself and to the rhythm of the negation of the negation. Reflection splits within itself

into an other, into which it turns back to itself, but this is actually nothing more than another expression of self-negation and the negation of negation. Reflection is the positive description of the movement of self-negation. While self-negation demonstrates what the spirit of *nous* means within Hegel's concept of "reason," reflection expresses the sense that the spirit of *logos* holds within the concept of reason. Ordinarily, people consider the negation of the negation as the formal framework with which Hegel builds his system, but strictly speaking, reflection alone is this formal framework. The negation of the negation is not the formal aspect of reason, but is instead its content, its inner impulse and soul.

Hegel insists, "[i]t is, quite generally, *meditative thinking* [*Nachdenken*] that initially contains the principle of philosophy (also in the sense of 'beginning')." ⁴⁰ He also holds this to be the case since the modern age after ancient Greece and the Reformation all the way up to Hegel's own age, because meditative (or reflective) thinking is nothing other than seeking out universal and certain standards, that is, laws and necessity, from within the great ocean of empirical things; they are also the very goal that Hegel himself is fighting for. Hegel, full of confidence, says in a letter to Schelling in November of 1800, that the "ideal of his youth must take on the form of reflection and at the same time be transformed into a system." ⁴¹ In the following year, he also says in *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*: "Philosophy, as a totality of knowledge produced by reflection, becomes a system, that is, an organic whole of concepts, whose highest law is not the understanding intellect, but reason." ⁴² Hegel finally realizes this ambition in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Philosophy*, where he states "a philosophizing without system cannot be scientific at all." ⁴³ We may interpret this as meaning: a philosophizing that does not take the form of reflection cannot be scientific at all. In a scientific system,

that progression is a retreat to the ground, to the origin and the truth on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends. —Thus consciousness, on its forward path from the immediacy with which it began, is led back to the absolute knowledge which is its innermost truth. ⁴⁴

Such a system that is reflected into itself constructs the scientific "circle," in which each moment is again a smaller circle, "for each single member ensouled by the method is reflected into itself so that, in returning to the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member." ⁴⁵ We could also draw an even more explicit passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to demonstrate this point:

As subject, [substance] is pure, *simple negativity*, and, as a result, it is the estrangement of what is simple, or, it is the doubling which posits oppositions and which is again the negation of this indifferent diversity and its

opposition. That is, it is only this *self-restoring* sameness, the reflective turn into itself in its otherness.⁴⁶

The negation of the negation is this very reflective turn into itself in its otherness and the “truth” as well. “Hence, reason is misunderstood if reflection is excluded from the truth and is not taken to be a positive moment of the absolute. Reflection is what makes truth into the result,”⁴⁷ because “mediation is nothing but self-moving self-equality, or, it is a reflective turn into itself, the moment of the I existing-for-itself, pure negativity.”⁴⁸ The fact is perfectly clear that in Hegel the true meaning of reflection is thought “turning into itself,” or rather, thought turning into itself in another (owing to the fact that true self-reflection is nothing other than thought returning back to itself from within another). So, without reflection there is no systematic thought (the circle), there is no philosophy and hence truth loses the ground from which to take shape and mature. If someone were to declare that he had already grasped the truth, but could not express it in reflective form and simply left it to the faith of a mysterious secret or “the ineffable,” this would not be the truth for Hegel. But if on the other hand someone merely took the literal expression of the truth for the latter without the ability to return from this external expression reflectively back inside of itself and reveal the concept’s internal identity within the superficial difference and opposition, this is only abstract truth for Hegel, formal and one-sided truth, and such reflection amounts to nothing more than an external reflection.

So clearly reflections predominantly concern expressions and the determinations shaped by expressions (thought-determinations, categories). Expressions make determinations. Whatever is determined is expressible and what is inexpressible is so because it has no shaped determination or determinacy. What gives a thought universality is its determinacy, the expressible, thanks to whose expression thought becomes universal and understandable by another. The universality of a thought proves it is graspable by all who have reason. Of course, the most fundamental for the universality of thought is still its being the essence of the matter, the universal. “Thinking things over, as has been said above, directs us to the universal in things, but the universal is itself one of the moments of the concept.”⁴⁹ Hegel therefore calls thought “objective thought,” insisting that “[i]nstead of using the expression thoughts, it would thus be better to speak of thought-determinations, in order to avoid any misunderstanding.”⁵⁰ What he means to say is, to turn thought from what everyone believes it to be, subjective activity of the inner mind, into what is objective, determinable and expressible. In this respect, thought is essentially connected at the hip to the language expressing it such that the two are inseparable:

Given that language is the product of thought, nothing that is not universal can be expressed in it either. What I only mean, is mine, belonging to me as this particular individual. If, however, language expresses only what is universal, then I cannot say what I mean only. And the ineffable,

feeling, sentiment are not what is most exquisite and true, but instead the most insignificant and untrue.⁵¹

All of human beings' intuitions, sentiments, representations and consciousness, all activity of spirit inside of the mind are founded and commanded by thought, for thought alone is what is universal and what can be expressed through language. Consequently, thought alone is what is rational, objective and necessary. In this way, thought and its logical determinateness are turned upside down from the (subjective) form of determinate contents into the (objective) content of all content: "However, the logical thoughts are not some accessory over against all this content. Rather, all this other content is merely an accessory compared to the logical forms. They are the ground, existing in and for itself, of everything."⁵² The truth that is sought after and found through this very inversion or reflective thinking over is also inverted as well. Such a truth is not the correspondence of thought or representation with an object, of which we ordinarily speak, "[i]n the philosophical sense, by contrast, truth means in general the agreement of a content with itself, to put it abstractly,"⁵³ or the correspondence of the object with the concept (thought) of it. This inversion can therefore be accomplished with language and its logical function by way of reflectively thinking over the event of my ability to say the word "I," by way of tracing back or "recalling" the thought-determinations contained within everyday language. Language is the first realized and certain evidence of human thought reaching objectivity and universality by way of transcending the sensuous world.

Turning the universal thought-determinations of language upside down into the objective thing in-itself, the essence and substance, is the core of the Western tradition of *logos* and the core of Hegel's concept of "thinking things over."

The particular sense of Hegel's concept of "reflection": reflections of reflection

I believe, the particular sense of Hegel's concept of reflection, or where Hegel's "reflection" differs from all other concepts of reflection in history consists in this reflection's identity with the principle of "self-negation," in his understanding of reflection from the standpoint of self-negation, in his viewing of reflection as the expression of self-referring negation, in his considering negation of and by itself as the inner soul of reflection. Reflectively thinking over is the form of expression that the process of self-negation takes. It is only that it takes the negation of and by itself for there to be any reflective thought turning back into itself, or rather, it is thanks to self-reflection alone that there is the negation of and by itself. Moreover, owing to the fact that the negation of and by itself is the negation of the negation, reflective thinking over in Hegel is "reflection of reflection" or "the reflective thought of reflective thought," which is what he calls "speculative thought."

Rüdiger Bubner points out in his work *Die Sache selbst in Hegels System* that the beginning of Hegel's the *Science of Logic* does not unreflectively accept those pre-given reflective relations as tacitly recognized presuppositions; rather, it is these reflective determinations themselves that require reflection: acknowledging the unavoidability of thoroughly thinking over (*Nachdenken*) the presupposition is the decisive presupposition of discussing the thing itself, the very thing (*Die Sache selbst*).⁵⁴ Yet, we cannot presuppose what such thorough reflection presupposes before the very thing begins, nor can we fall into infinite regress, for the presupposition exists nowhere else than in the thing itself: the presupposition only exists in the continuous presupposing of the presupposition; it exists in the presupposing as such. Science (philosophy) can presuppose its own presupposition by itself, and this self-sufficiency of science (philosophy) crosses over into the thing itself from the outside by deduction.⁵⁵ In the system of speculative philosophy, reflective thought on reflective thought or self-sublating mediation fuses into *a one* that no longer involves another but only self-unification, a completely indifferent, pure immediacy.⁵⁶ These insights from Bubner offer people a deeper understanding of Hegel's concept of reflection, but the relationship of this sort of reflection to negativity is not specifically something that Bubner underscores and analyzes aside from mentioning in passing that the force of the negative is a means that reflection uses to test and break the purely factual nature of philosophy.⁵⁷ In his view, Hegel's reflective thought of reflective thought actually comes from the same scientific or rational standpoint as that of the principle of reflection that had held sway in the modern age prior to him, but it does not show where Hegel ultimately breaks through the pre-given framework of modern reflection and penetrates *die Sache selbst*. The fact is that Hegel does not throw out the modern principle of reflection and formulate some other "speculative reflection" to replace it, but instead takes the modern principle of reflection and views it from the active perspective, as a principle of negation negating itself. This also injects a lively soul into its body that would tend to rigidify without it. This refining, reforming or rejuvenating of Hegel's reflection is mainly undertaken in the "Doctrine of Essence" section of his *Science of Logic* and especially in the opening chapter where he discusses *Schein* in particular. But this also takes on the obscurest of the most obscure and deepest parts among Hegel's most obscure Logic, so we have to be diligent and meticulous in our examination.

Hegel insists that examining the essence of any thing (being) requires due reflection. He also insists that it takes negating the immediate being of the thing as inessential, while at the same time preserving what is affirmative of this thing in its essence. Reflection takes the being and existence of the thing into inessential shine (*Schein*) and tracks down the essence beneath that very shine, that is, the essential being that differs from the shine's being, but the difference between these two kinds of being is not that which is found between two parallel things (each as another of one another), but in the being of the essence that has been sublated, that is, the "absolute negativity," the object

of whose negation is the immediacy of being, that is, the being of the shine. This absolute negativity determines the being of the shine as the being of the essence. Therefore, undertaking reflection on the essence of the thing passes through two stages. First, it requires viewing what is immediate being as merely shine or appearance, as an other of the essence.⁵⁸ In this way, immediate being is seen as the indeterminate being of the immediate, which only possesses determinate being when it is in relation to the other (the essence), that is, when it is negated by the essence and consequently is nothing aside from empty immediacy: “[s]imple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection; it refers to the distinction from what is mediated.”⁵⁹ Reflection done in this way is skepticism, which begins with the modern idealism of Descartes, that is, by the all-around viewing of any immediate being that is present (from the sensuous world to the empirical self) as unreliable examples of shine, of appearance. Skepticism negates all, and after Descartes doubts (negates) everything, he discovers doubt itself alone to be indubitable. Descartes therefore posits a negative, doubting subject (*cogito*), who determines or negates everything else that appears. Later, Leibniz, Kant and Fichte will go on to turn all that is present through the subject into appearances that are negated. However, in no way dissimilar from skepticism, modern idealism also negates merely the essentiality of the appearance without touching these appearances themselves, which are still given by way of external immediacy, but are not actively deduced by the subject. That said, modern idealism posits a subject who may enjoy the possibility of going beyond skepticism, that is, the attitude of inveterately negating all appearances, and who thereby can actually explore the relationship between shine and the negative essence of the subject, which ushers in the second stage of reflective movement. When Hegel states, “Being has preserved itself in essence inasmuch as this latter, in its infinite negativity, has this equality with itself,”⁶⁰ this could nearly be viewed as word-for-word rephrasing of Descartes’s proposition “I think, therefore I am.” This proposition contains two moments, namely “negativity existing in itself and reflected immediacy.”⁶¹ In other words, all that is presently given lacks its own positive existence until it exists as “my” idea when it is negated by the cogito, the “I think.” The cogito, the I think, is itself immediate being within reflective thought (within “I think that I am thinking”). These two moments make up the two moments of shine: each shine is both negated as shine itself and affirmed as shine “of the I” (because each shine contains this essence of the “I”). At the same time, shine also makes up the two moments of essence: essence, “the I,” is not other than doubt and negation, “negativity (of shine) existing in-itself,” but it is also “reflected immediacy,” because it can no longer doubt itself. In this way, although shine and essence are differentiated from one another, this relationship between them also contains unity. Shine is but essence itself within the determinateness of being, but “[i]t is, therefore, the identical unit of absolute negativity and immediacy.”⁶² So, the essence’s negation of shine is truly nothing more than essence’s negation of itself by itself; it is negative reference to itself, “a self-repelling negating.”⁶³ It returns to itself in the determination

or negation of shine, and the self's negation and determination of appearance does not even go beyond self-consciousness, but merely unifies appearance in itself as something non-self-substisting (as Kant's synthetic unity of apperception). On the other hand, when shine or appearance is so unified in essence, owing to the fact that it is infinite determinateness, it is always immediately given independently standing outside of essence every time, while essence (the ego) sets out to negate it from outside of the appearance immediately given. So, essence is also an immediately given negativity, which turns the immediate determinateness of shine itself into a moment of itself. Thus, "Shine is, therefore, essence itself, but essence in a determinateness, in such a way, however, that the determinateness is only a moment, and the essence is the shining of itself within itself."⁶⁴

These two stages of the reflection of essence are simply: (1) "that essence is taken at first as an immediate, not as it is in itself, namely as an immediacy which is immediacy as pure mediacy or absolute negativity."⁶⁵ This is but the starting point where or immediate subject who goes being skepticism and finds an immediate "I think," by means of which essence as absolute negativity secures a positive expression; (2) "Therefore, the sublation of this determinateness of essence is found solely in showing non-essence is only shine, but essence contains shine within itself as the infinite movement within itself; this movement determines the immediacy of essence as negativity and the negativity of essence as immediacy, such that this movement is also the shining of essence within itself."⁶⁶ In other words, essence, the cogito, is not purely an immediate; it is found in relation to shine; it actively synthesizes shine and can only immediately shine forth itself in this synthesis (negation). "In this, in its self-movement, essence is reflection."⁶⁷ The consideration of the reflection of essence discovers: essence is reflection. Hegel furthermore makes a determination of the content of the stages undergone by the movement of reflection itself (and not just reflection's consideration of essence) in the section on "Reflection." This is the deeper determination (and hence more abstract and obscure determination as well). Even though immediacy of essence is immediacy as negativity, within the standpoint of Being, essence is ultimately thought of as an immediately given, self-evident starting point with which to negate all (shine), or we should say as an "originary," a "substrate." Conversely, within the standpoint of reflection, "immediacy is only this movement itself," that is, the movement of the negation of negation itself. Thus, it is the movement from negation to negation back to itself, which reveals essence not as a static point or substrate, but as this movement itself, pure-negativity itself. Yet, this movement of reflection itself also passes through three stages: posited reflection, external reflection and determining reflection.

Posited reflection

This amounts to Descartes's positing of the ego through doubt, the cogito, that is, departing from the external world and turning back to itself. In this

“meditation,” he reduces it to the reflective movement of the subjective essence. In Hegel’s words,

This self-equality or immediacy, therefore, is not a first from which the beginning is made and which would pass over into its negation; nor is there an existent substrate which would go through the moves of reflection; immediacy is rather just this movement itself.⁶⁸

The agent carrying out the negation (the I) and the negative actions (doubting, thinking) are not two different things, but rather join forces (*Zusammengehen*) and merge into one, immediate equality. However, thanks to this immediate equality also being the immediate equality of negation itself, it is also the negation of and by itself, so immediacy, “immediacy which is in itself the negative, the negative of itself: its being is to be what it is not.”⁶⁹ When this negation of and by itself returns to itself “purely and simply as determinateness or as the immediacy of self-reflection,” it finds its own being (I am). This is “posited being,” whose being (existence) is like the beginning of reflective movement thanks to being immediately affirmed, self-evident being, but this immediate being is actually nothing more than reflection’s very movement of turning back: “I think” is not an immediate being or any being like objects or other substances. Inversely, “I am” is actually equal to “I think,” or thought, as such; it is the process of return whereby thought continually turns back to itself and penetrates deeper into itself. Because I am only conscious that I am thinking, I can think anything, but this “anything” also includes thought itself, so I think must presuppose I think that “I think,” which again must presuppose I think that I think that I think and so on, ad infinitum. This infinite regress of “I think” returning back to itself could simply be determined as the infinity of “I think” (as process of movement), and so reverts back to the immediacy of I think, which is the “posited reflection.” Posited reflection is what posits the “I think” as an immediate “I am,” but the existence (being) at stake here is no longer that of shine and phenomenal appearance but rather that of essence; it is the being of negation, that of the returning movement, whose immediacy is self-sublated immediacy. However, the “I am” is ultimately the aspect of my existence’s immediate affirmation and determinateness. The infinite, negative movement that is posited by the “I think” through the “I am” is already sublated; it is presupposed (*Voraussetzen*) beforehand. For example, the result of Descartes’s reflection upon the experience of inner mental acts is the discovery that “I think therefore I am” is the “transcendental principle” of human thought, or the self-evident “axiom,” which is already presupposed (posited beforehand) in every concrete act of thinking. “Our inner directed reflection is essentially the presupposing of that from which the reflection is the turning back.”⁷⁰ In other words, reflection must be posited; otherwise, it will always remain steadfast in doubt and infinite regress without result, but once reflection is posited, it turns from empirical reflection into transcendental reflection; it does not establish essence as empirical object

of the highest sort (like the substance of the soul), but rather establishes it as an innate capacity, a synthetic power in command over all empirical objects, all shine. Kant clearly sees this point and shows Descartes's "cogito" to be the substance of a transcendental self-consciousness, but strips off and throws away the outer shell of empirical reflection in the "rational psychology" of Descartes and others.

However, even though self-consciousness's synthetic capacity of apperception is "posited beforehand," it can only exist in the act of actually synthesizing empirical data; otherwise, it would be "empty"; "it therefore sublates its positing, and inasmuch as it is in its positing the sublating of positing, it is presupposing."⁷¹ We could also say, rather, that it sublates beforehand this presupposing of it. Apperception must break up its pure equality with self and "leave" itself to synthesize empirical data. It can only exist in this way and so it sublates the immediacy of itself. However, this departure from itself at the same time initiates a turning back to itself, a reaching of itself. Thus, "[t]he movement, as forward movement, turns immediately around into itself and so is only self-movement—a movement which comes from itself."⁷² Transcendental reflection can only "turn back" into itself by going beyond transcendental immediacy to regulate the empirical, to drive this transcendental movement through the inverse of itself, its opposite. In this way, the entire process could still also be seen as one of an immediacy that has been sublated (immediately reversed), because it is nothing other than the self-movement of the transcendental self, the spontaneous act of apperception. However, since reflection is presupposed as a negative act, it must be determined through the immediate's opposition with something, that is, opposition with another, but this other (empirically given data) is also immediately given, given to it from the outside for it to negate, so the immediacy of reflection's equality with itself finds itself in an external relation with the immediacy of its other. In this way, reflection is determined as external reflection.

External reflection

The presupposed reflection must itself seek the starting point of positing, the beginning of the positing (and for this reason it is "pre"-supposed), but thanks to at the same time being "sublated beforehand," what it finds is two beginnings: it doubles in this determination: on the one hand as presupposed it is self-reflection, that is, the immediate; on the other hand it is also the reflection of itself with negative reference to itself; it is that reference to itself which does not refer to itself.⁷³ The main goal of Kant's "transcendental reflection" is to attribute all representations in the human mind to two different kinds of cognitive capacities, that is, understanding and sensibility,⁷⁴ so as to construct the object of human cognition not simply through the logical (logical reflection) but also with respect to empirical data. Kant therefore opposed the two reflective tendencies that stood in opposition to one another at the time,

that is, the one-sidedness of logical reflection and empirical reflection. Felix Meiner argues that Leibniz basically renders phenomena understanding, while Locke proceeds according to his Noogeny in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, whereas Kant thought a pure empirical reflection in psychology would have no right to call itself Understanding or *Verstand*, so he calls it Noogeny, which turns all concepts of the understanding into functions of sensibility and dresses them up as empirical or singular concepts of reflection.⁷⁵ Kant's transcendental reflection is thus the synthesis of these two kinds of reflection. But in Hegel's view, this synthesis is still external and the two sides of the synthesis still originate from other extremes.

This external reflection is the syllogism in which the two extremes are the immediate and the reflection into itself; the middle term is the reference connecting the two, the determinate immediate, so that one part of this connecting reference, the immediate, falls to one extreme alone, and the other, the determinateness or the negation, only to the other extreme.⁷⁶

Hegel also mentions in the Doctrine of the Concept:

Kant places ahead of [understanding] only feeling and intuition. But, for a start, he himself betrays the incompleteness of this progression of stages by appending to the Transcendental Logic or the Doctrine of the Understanding a treatise on the concepts of reflection—a sphere lying between intuition and understanding, or being and concept.⁷⁷

Hegel insists, this external reflection posits negation (I think) as the immediate, “But thereby it immediately is equally a positing, the sublation of the immediate which is its negative; and this negative, from which it seemed to begin as from something alien, only is in this its beginning.”⁷⁸ The a priori apperception of self-consciousness shows us that it seems to spontaneously emerge and act from some “I in-itself,” but the sensuous matter that it faces is another thing in-itself acting upon our sense organs; these two immediate things in-themselves both seem to be unknowable “alien things.” However, reflection itself proves that such an immediate alien only exists during reflection; it is posited by reflection and identical to reflection, “But it is at the same time determined as a negative, as immediately in opposition to something, and hence to an other.”⁷⁹ In this way, when reflection posits it as immediate, unknowable other, it already contains a negation of its unknowability: “but it is reflection itself which negates this determining,” so “[t]he externality of reflection *vis-à-vis* the immediate is consequently sublated,” and “[i]t thus transpires that external reflection is not external but is just as much immanent reflection of immediacy itself.”⁸⁰ This is Hegel's infamous critique of Kant's thing in-itself, which is to say: the thing in-itself is nothing but an abstract object stripped of all content by negation.

what is left, namely, what is completely abstract, or totally empty, and determined only as what is “beyond”; the negative of representation, of feeling, of determinate thinking, etc. But it is just as simple to reflect that this *caput mortuum* is itself only the product of thinking, and precisely of the thinking that has gone to the extreme of pure abstraction, the product of the empty “I” that makes its own empty self-identity into its object.⁸¹

In this comment Hegel explicitly states his analysis of external reflection here is aimed at the external reflection of Kant (in many other areas, Hegel similarly labels all modern philosophy prior to Kant such as Fichte and Schelling as “external reflection”). Kant views reflection as the movement of subjective judgment. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he still clearly views reflection as a “judgment,” but it is only viewed as consciousness to which cognitive power (sensibility or understanding) representations in judgment respectively belong, which is a subjective “state of the inner mind.” However he argues, “[b]ut all judgments, indeed all comparisons, require a **reflection**”⁸² Judgment here must undergo a transcendental reflection beforehand (to use Hegel’s words, “presupposed reflection”), which seems to be the pre-judgment of judgment to see whether it is judgment in the logical concept or involves judgment of the object and appearance. However, even though this subjective act of the inner mind is “transcendental” reflection, it does not in-itself construct the principle and territory over which it uniquely reigns. It is only a way of thinking that stems from the nature of the understanding; it tells people to focus on distinguishing between sensibility and understanding, appearance and thing in-itself, when judging. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant simply presents one kind of “reflective judgment,” that is, a judgment which seeks the universal law for given particular appearances and differentiates it from “determining judgment” in the cognition of understanding (that is, using already given universal laws to determine particular appearances). For Hegel, however, this differentiation does not mean much, because determining judgment is reflective as well, insofar as it involves that which is still merely subjective (like reflective judgment), not the objective thing in-itself, even though Kant himself calls this subjective knowledge “objective.” At the same time, Hegel also asserts these two kinds of judgment are both external reflection, in which the particular and the universal are split up and opposed, each only refers to itself, and their uniting is like binding a wooden stick to your leg, “which applies itself to the immediate as to something given.”⁸³ However, Hegel also thinks that although Kant’s reflective judgment is external, it already contains the seed of internal reflection. The premise of external reflection is presupposed and posited beforehand; it is also non-reflectively posited and given, which is not reflection in the complete sense, but insofar as we do not rigidly cling to the “subjectivity” of universal laws, but rather see it as the immanent essence of the particular thing or the immediate thing, we can reach true, absolute reflection. Kant’s thought of “inner teleology” actually already conveys this level of meaning. Thus, Hegel argues:

the concept of absolute reflection, too, is implicit in it. For the universal [...] is taken to be the essence of the immediate from which the reflection began [...] Therefore, what reflection does to the immediate, and the determinations that derive from it, is not anything external to it but is rather its true being.⁸⁴

However, Kant himself never explicitly recognizes this level. Regarding the reflective determination that he proposes,

They stubbornly resist, therefore, their movement; their being is the self-identity which they possess in their determinateness, and by virtue of it, though indeed presupposing each other, in this referring to the other they nonetheless maintain themselves as totally separate.⁸⁵

Modern philosophy's criticism of this kind of reflection (mainly referring to Jacobi's and Schelling's) is perfectly reasonable, but doing away with all reflection in advocacy of returning to immediate knowledge of the absolute is just going too far.

Determining reflection

In this part, Hegel mainly discusses how the previous two forms of reflection (positing and external) combine into determining reflection, because the latter is the "unity" of the previous two forms of reflection. He states, "[e]xternal reflection begins from immediate being, *positing* reflection from nothing." We have also pointed out already that positing reflection posits the negative and nothing as positive, as being, that is, reverses the order of being-nothing into nothing-being. External reflection then again negates this positive being as something external; it seems as if what it negates is not negation itself, but rather something positive "posited beforehand," which for the act of negation is an immediate other that is alien to itself. These two kinds of reflection, as we have already illustrated with examples, amount to Descartes's reflection and Kant's reflection respectively, both of which make up two stages of the development of reflection in general. However, there is a third stage of reflection that synthesizes the rational parts of the previous two kinds of reflection and sublates their partiality or one-sidedness. This is the stage of determining reflection.

Concretely speaking, what positing reflection posits is still only a reflective act of negation, but not an active negating subject; "it is only in the reflection-into itself but is not this reflection itself."⁸⁶ This act of negation (like "I think") is made infinite negation, infinite movement, and consequently gains a being of its own ("posited being") or positive being ("I am"), but this being or existence is only that of ceaselessly doubting, thinking and negating. This movement leads reflection from determinate being (*Dasein*) to essence, but it is itself only situated between determinate being and essence; it stands in

opposition to determinate being and at the same time still has not grasped the essence of determinate being. It is only a subjective act of reflection—it still is not reflective determination, because it only acknowledges the inner impulse of negation without being able to swiftly lead the spirit of *nous* into the certain regulation of *logos*, so it is without result: it comes from doubt and what it posits is only a doubt (negation). Of course, Cartesian doubt does not in fact only posit a negation but posits a substance (I); he also proceeds from this to posit another substance (matter) and a highest substance (God), so he already enters “presupposing” reflection or external reflection. Hegel also mentions that Descartes’s metaphysics proceeds by way of an external reflection.⁸⁷ However, Descartes’s substance (the self) has not truly been understood as active substance but as an externally determinable objective entity (the soul), which is not rigorous logically speaking. The purest and most logically rigorous representative of external reflection of the understanding is not Descartes, however, but Kant. Modern understanding begins with Descartes, but Descartes begins from skepticism. This shows why when Hegel speaks of the modern idealist interpretation of “shine,” he lists Leibniz, Kant and Fichte, while leaving out Descartes alone, precisely because he assigns Descartes to the skepticism’s interpretation of shine. External reflection is the transcendence of positing reflection, which it contains within itself, but he renders this infinite negation as having its own determination “beforehand”; it is no longer a purely subjectless act of reflection in-itself but sets out from something predetermined or transcendental. In general, since reflection is not simply negation, but must be the negation of itself, it is “something” negating itself by itself, and this “itself” must be posited beforehand. In Descartes, this “something” is his empirical (doubting, thinking) “I,” but this “I” ought to be negated as something empirical, leaving reflection as before with no solid ground; it is still just a ray of light vanishing in darkness. This solid ground is posited in Kant’s “transcendental ego,” and consequently, he could posit “the determination of reflection” proceeding from this solid ground. Here, negating an other (doubting, thinking) is no longer merely reverting back to negation itself but is rather determining an other (man legislating for Nature), but at this moment in time, it is also determining itself (self-reflection), and is therefore a determination of reflection. “The determination of reflection, on the contrary, has for this ground immanent reflectedness. Positedness gets fixed in determination precisely because reflection is self-equality in its negatedness; the latter is therefore itself reflection into itself.”⁸⁸ The determination of reflection is like determining an other, which is actually determining self. That determined something “has deflected its reflection-into-other into reflection-into itself.”⁸⁹ The other, here, is merely shine, and the self is finally the essence and shiner of the shine. Thus,

reflection is a determining that abides in itself. In its essence does not exit from itself; the distinctions are solely posited, taken back into essence. But, from the other side, they are not posited but are rather reflected into

themselves; negation as negation is equality with itself, not in its other, not reflected into its non-being.⁹⁰

This is Kant's principle of subjective reflection, which succeeded in providing the ground (*der Grund*); "Determining reflection is for this reason reflection that has exited from itself; the equality of essence with itself is lost in the negation, and negation predominates."⁹¹ Liberating Kant's reflection from subjective externality is still the negative principle of reflection itself, that is, the principle of "positing reflection." "Determining reflection both possesses the self-determinateness of Kant's subjective reflection and at the same time also allows negation to predominate." In this self-negation and self-sublation, it also however enjoys the perpetual being of itself through the determination of reflection. In determining reflection,

The determinateness of the reflection is the reference in it to its otherness. —It is not a determinateness that exists quiescent, one which would be referred to an other in such a way that the referred term and its reference would be different, each something existing in itself, each a something that excludes its other and its reference to this other from itself. Rather, the determination of reflection is within it the determinate side and the reference of this determinate side as determinate, that is, the reference to its negation.⁹²

The determinateness of reflection becomes infinite self-reference. Hegel follows up from this in the section "Essentiality or the Determination of Reflection" by taking the next step of analyzing the aforementioned three types or stages of reflection from the perspective of logical law (for instance, they separately manifest as identity, difference and contradiction). These treatments are relatively solid, and others have already discussed this at length, so here I will not do a follow-up analysis.

Important here is, although the determination of reflection is presented in "external reflection," it only truly reveals its nature in determining reflection. Although Kant's determination of reflection is only the self-equal relation of reflection (for instance, his pure concepts and categories are but presentations of the activity of self-consciousness), but owing to the fact that it is posited "beforehand" (these categories are not deduced from self-consciousness, but come ready-made from formal logic), it still lacks sufficient reflection for that ground, that transcendental precondition of itself, and it thus cannot transcend subjective self-equality. This determination of reflection is only implicitly or in-itself the being of positedness.⁹³ Kant's reflection lays the ground for the negation of and by itself, but what it lacks is the active principle of this very self-negation; its reflection and negation stop somewhere and consequently lead the entire system to rest there. Even so, Hegel does not cancel the determination of reflection as such, but elucidates its true sense and fills it with substantial content, combining it with the principle of

negation, which turns it into an active principle; it is not only used to determine “appearance,” for it is itself essentiality; it is moreover the essentiality that determines appearance and ceaselessly goes out beyond itself, during which it actualizes infinite self-reference. Clearly, the designation of Hegelian reflection as “reflection of reflection” is well grounded. In fact, Hegel’s reflection is a reverting back to (Descartes’s) positing reflection on the ground of (Kant’s) “external reflection,” or he re-reflects on Kant’s determination of reflection with Descartes’s principle of reflective negation. Therefore, it is a third-order reflection (reflection of reflection of reflection). But the ascending motions of such reflections are ultimately manifestations of one and the same principle of “absolute reflection”: reflection is both reflection in otherness and at the same time self-reflection; it is reflecting itself in otherness. Hegel frequently mentions absolute reflection (pp. 400, 402, 405, 426 and elsewhere) In actuality, it is the commonality of all three reflections or “reflection in general.” Hegel sometimes calls it pure reflection and the pure determinations of reflection.⁹⁴ Zhang Shiyong insists, “pure, absolute reflection” is only the lowest stage of reflection, that is, the movement characterized by “supposing or positing reflection” or “the movement from nothing to nothing,” and yet,

the stage of the “shine” from “nothing to nothing” is only successfully transcended and the highest stage of “shine” is only reached by “transcending the pure determinations of reflection” (identity, difference, contradiction) and by entering, after passing through the “ground,” the second main stage of the Doctrine of Essence, that is, “appearance.” The category of “ground” marks the conclusion of “the movement from nothing to nothing” and the main entrance to the stage of “appearance.”⁹⁵

In my view, though, “the movement from nothing to nothing” seems to be the general abstract principle for the entire stage of the “Doctrine of Essence,” which is only sublated when the “concept” is reached and consequently the reversion back to “being” is achieved; because of this, the pure determinations of reflection (identity, difference, contradiction) are not shaken off at the stage of “appearance” and “actuality,” but are instead concretely actualized there. Therefore, “ground” and the later categories are not only concrete, determined reflections but at the same time also contain pure reflection into itself. The ground is the transition to “appearance” and at the same time represents the transition of pure reflection in general to “concept.”

The three stages in the development of reflection are the self-unfolding of absolute reflection or reflection in general. However, this process of development does not conclude here. “Determining reflection” continually has to reach outside of itself precisely because it is determining; it has to continually negate its own self-identity and come to rule by virtue of its negativity, so as the determination of reflection, it is eternally incomplete. This makes it such

that there is still a distinction between determining reflection and absolute reflection in general. Namely, the latter is the unactualized purpose of the former, which, in turn, only “receives its true meaning” in the last of reflected determinations of essence, that is, in the “ground,” which is determination determined as sublated determination.⁹⁶ This means, ground is “the unity of pure reflection and determining reflection.”⁹⁷ This is because,

Determining reflection, for its part, does posit such terms as are identical with themselves; but these are at the same time only determined references. Ground, on the contrary, is mediation that is real, since it contains reflection as sublated reflection; it is essence that turns back into itself through its non-being and posits itself.⁹⁸

Hegel insists that in this way determined reflection boils down to the “ground,” which, in turn, boils down to a connection:

That connection, the whole as essential unity, is to be found only in the concept, in the purpose [...] to be a ground in a teleological sense is a property of the concept and of the mediation effected through of it, and this mediation is reason.⁹⁹

This is also to say, absolute reflection as the unified whole of essence is only actualizable and completable at the very end in the concept. Hegel, of course, speaks of connection, which must itself develop through the series of categories in the “Doctrine of Essence.” We could say Hegel is fully dedicated to developing this “connection” from the first pair of categories of essence emerging in opposition in “Ground” (in the *Logic of Essence* they are “form and essence,” in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* they are “form and matter”) all the way to the final substantiality, causality and reciprocal relation. This is also for the sake of exhibiting the genesis of the concept. The entirety of this exhibition is a tracing back to the ground, or “tracking down” the ground:

This is the general shape in which the existing world is presented initially to reflection, namely, as an indeterminate multitude of existents which, being reflected simultaneously into themselves and into something else, are in the mutual relationship of ground and grounded with regard to each other. In this motley play of the world, taken as the sum total of all existents, a stable footing cannot be found anywhere at first, and everything appears at this stage to be merely relative, to be conditioned by something else, and similarly as conditioning something else. The reflective understanding makes it its business to discover and to pursue these all-sided relations; but this leaves the question of a final purpose unanswered, and, with the further development of the logical Idea, the reason that is in need of comprehension therefore strikes out beyond this standpoint of mere relativity.¹⁰⁰

Visibly, the true ground is the concept or the purpose, “In that the concept has proven itself to be the truth of being and essence, both of which have gone back into it as into its ground.”¹⁰¹

Therefore, only the concept is no longer “reflected determination,” is no longer “the movement from nothing to nothing,” but is instead the reflection of sublated reflection. The concept, as the reflection of sublated reflection is here no longer merely “thinking after [in the sense of tracking down],” namely *Nachdenken* or “thinking over,” but is also the thought itself that is tracked down, but there is still reflecting within the concept itself as well. Such a reflection is the means of constituting, or the medium that constructs the “concrete concept.” There will be more detail on this later. This is objective thought as well as free thought at the same time, that is, thought which no longer rests satisfied with dividing itself into essence and appearance but attends instead to self-development; it is the principle of negation and that of reflection finally reaching inner indivisibility, when thought begins to embody the true meaning of reason by way of fusing together the two great factors of *nous* and *logos*.

Notes

- 1 Kahn 1981, 149.
- 2 In Western scholarship and translation, these fragments are generally interpreted in line with other meanings of the term *logos*, so where the Chinese translate Pythagoras as saying “words [*logos*] are winds of the soul,” Western versions of the same sentence have “reasons [*logos*] are winds of the soul,” “faculties [*logos*] are winds of the soul,” etc. Moreover, the Western versions invariably have Pythagoras saying, “reasons/faculties of the soul are invisible,” “similar to *aether*,” whereas the Chinese versions generally connect this statement to following ones about words and deeds being the bonds of the soul, and hence render the same clause as “it [the soul] is indivisibly bonded with words.” So aside from the wide disparity between Western and Chinese translations of *logos* in Pythagoras, there is also the serious gap between the Western version’s “invisible” and the Chinese version’s “indivisible.” I will not wade into the dense issues revolving around the original ancient Greek fragments, but only want to point out this divergence for the reader.
- 3 Ye 1998 70.
- 4 Ibid., 74.
- 5 Ibid., 148.
- 6 Descartes 2008, 7.
- 7 Hegel 1892, 492.
- 8 Locke 2009, 9–10.
- 9 Descartes 2008, 175.
- 10 Locke 2009, 305.
- 11 Ibid., 307.
- 12 See (Kant 1996, 336), “On the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection.”
- 13 Locke 2009, 418.
- 14 Hegel 2010, 379.
- 15 Gadamer 2004, 385.

- 16 Locke 2009, 100.
- 17 Kant 2007, 231.
- 18 Hegel 1991, 176; italics in original.
- 19 Ibid., 25; italics in original.
- 20 Ibid., 166.
- 21 Ibid., 6.
- 22 Ibid., 36.
- 23 Ibid., 37.
- 24 Hegel 2010, 26.
- 25 Zhang 1982, 573.
- 26 Hegel 1991, 95.
- 27 Ibid., 33.
- 28 Ibid., 49; italics in original.
- 29 Ibid., 52; italics in original.
- 30 Ibid., italics in original.
- 31 Ibid., 54.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., 55; italics in original.
- 34 Ibid., 57; italics in original.
- 35 Ibid., 58.
- 36 Hegel 2010, 58.
- 37 Ibid., 523.
- 38 Ibid., 74.
- 39 Ibid., 47.
- 40 Hegel 1991, 30; italics in original.
- 41 Hegel 1952–60, 59.
- 42 Limnatis & Hegel 2008, 181.
- 43 Hegel 1991, 39; italics in original.
- 44 Hegel 2010, 49.
- 45 Ibid., 751.
- 46 Hegel 2018, 12; italics in original.
- 47 Ibid., 14.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Hegel 1991, 58.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., 53.
- 52 Ibid., 61.
- 53 Ibid., 62.
- 54 Bubner 1980, 40–70.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Hegel 2010, 342, 361.
- 59 Ibid., 302.
- 60 Ibid., 344.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid., 345.

- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Meiner 1975, 13.
- 67 Hegel 2010, 345.
- 68 Ibid., 346.
- 69 Ibid., 347.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 For more on this point, see the Chinese version of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, vol. 2, for the translator's notes on page 19.
- 74 For reference, see *Critique of Judgment* A262–B318.
- 75 Meiner 1919, 298. Also, see *Critique of Pure Judgment* A271–B327.
- 76 Hegel 2010, 349.
- 77 Ibid., 517.
- 78 Ibid., 349.
- 79 Ibid., 348.
- 80 Ibid., 349–50.
- 81 Hegel 1991, 87.
- 82 Kant 1996, 366.
- 83 Hegel 2010, 350.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid., 455.
- 88 Ibid., 352.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Ibid., 352.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 See (Hegel 1991, 179).
- 95 Zhang 1981, 278.
- 96 Hegel 2010, 386.
- 97 Ibid., 390.
- 98 Ibid., 387.
- 99 Ibid., 388.
- 100 Hegel 1991, 193.
- 101 Ibid., 231.

5 Reflection and reason

We have pointed out when discussing the general concept of reflection in the previous section that the Western concept of “reflection” that Hegel generally accepted refers to the rational transcendence of human thinking over the representations of sensibility and intuition. Hegel then inverts this very reason (*logos*) that has transcended sensible representations into the true essence and objective thing in-itself. This determination also applies to “empirical reflection” just as, for example, Locke’s reflection turns “substance,” the product of reflection, into abstract objective being. From this perspective, reflection is rational thinking, or the transcendence of reason (self-consciousness). However, what the Western tradition calls “reason” is extremely complex in meaning. We can draw out at least four levels of meaning from it:

1. Reason in the most general sense of “man is a rational animal” broadly refers to all of the mental activities that distinguish humans from other animals, that is, knowing, feeling emotion and intending;
2. Reason as the acts of knowing, that is, understanding, referring to human beings’ capacity of thought as distinct from emotion and passion (will), namely the “rational soul”;
3. Reason as rational cognition in contrast to sensible cognition or reason as human beings’ capacity to grasp the laws and universal essence of the objective object through concepts and logic (judgment, deduction);
4. Reason as the higher-level capacity of rational knowing, that is, dialectical knowing, as distinct from understanding (intellect).

These four levels of meaning are differentiated by elevation of mind, but there is one unified meaning that they all share, which is “transcendence,” that is, going beyond the appearance to reach the essence, transcending the singular being in-itself of animality and sensibility, and attaining the being in-itself of the spiritual and universal. Thus, the spirit of reason is also the spirit of reflection. Transcendence is that into universality, such that it manifests the tendency of *logos*; transcendence is itself that of activity, such that it also manifests the tendency of *nous*. Aristotle presents man as being the “rational animal” (ζῷον λογος ἐχόν), which expresses the first tendency, where the term

“reason” (λογος) originally meant the universal discourse (*logos*) that had been seen as something public and common to all since Heraclitus. Aristotle bases the proposition “man is a political animal” on this. But Aristotle divides the human soul into nutritive soul, sensuous soul and rational soul, and then draws the distinction from within the human soul between “passive reason” and “active reason,” according to which distinction “reason” is no longer λογος but νους (*nous*). But as “form” (*eidos*), it is identical to *logos*, and these divisions of the soul as such reflect the tendency of reason to rise above the perceptual and passive material of animality and reach the universal, active form. The transcendence over understanding and intellect, which Plato already presents when distinguishing the four levels of knowledge (confidence, conjecture, thought and knowledge), takes place by way of this fourth and last highest level of reason that Hegel calls “dialectic.” The generations that came to follow Plato would also accept this division, like Bruno, whose impact on Hegel’s conception of reason was profound. Spinoza also insists that the highest rational knowledge transcends thought, but he is referring here to abstract intellectual intuition. Kant understands reason from the standpoint of understanding as well. These two kinds of reason both fall under the category of understanding for Hegel. Reason in Hegel predominantly means dialectic, which is paired in opposition to understanding.

However, in the Western tradition of “rationalism,” although the term “reason” envelops the internal motivation of an impulse that is *nous*, as the tendency to transcend the immediacy of sensibility and grasp abstract universal forms and essential laws, reason is colored more by the spirit of *logos*, so rationalism is often regarded as synonymous with *logosism*. The first to represent this kind of rationalism in the history of Western philosophy were Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans (although Hegel thought Pythagoras was merely a transitional figure). Because they do not first derive the *arche* from the sensuous object, “the *arche* and reason that they present guide them to reach a higher order reality.”¹ The influence of the Pythagorean school with this mathematical transcendence over the Western tradition of rationalism is as profound as it gets, insofar as the Western tradition almost instinctively tends toward the mathematical and geometrical approaches. The Latin term *ratio* originally meant the partition and division of quantities (λογος originally implied this as well). With the formation of mechanism in the modern natural sciences, the source of the word “reason” and its meaning coming from the spirit of *nous* gradually became a forgotten matter. Merely the principle of *logos* remained in the reason of different discourses and orders. We owe Hegel for reawakening the spirit of *nous* in reason and for turning dialectical negation into the inner soul of reason, which amounts to no less than a major achievement. He refutes the conception of reason as limited and determined, proposing instead that “reason is the universal; the universal transcends particulars; reason can only be the very transcendence over what is limiting.”² Reason is neither limited by sensuous particularities nor by the particularities of the understanding; it is the transcendence of freedom itself.

However, at the same time, we must not forget that Hegel's philosophy is after all heir to the Western rationalist tradition. He not only restored the ancient spirit of *nous* but also therefore systematically exercised the spirit of *logos*.

Hegel constructed the logical form for his entire philosophy through precisely reflection (transcendence) over traditional rational reflection (transcendence). This form is, of course, "rational" in the strictest sense (i.e., the dialectical sense), but it also embodies the other senses of "reason." As Hegel puts it: "In terms of form, the logical domain has three sides: (a) the abstract side or that of the *understanding*, (b) the *dialectical* or *negatively rational* side, (c) the *speculative* or *positively rational* side."³ He explains that these three sides are not the three "parts" of the *Logic*, but the three "moments" of every concept in it. Before these moments have fundamentally developed, before these three moments show their layering through the transparency of the final concept (Idea), such a division comes with a critical air and appears in quality as "historical description." Hegel accordingly divides the *Logic* into three parts, that of "Existence," that of "Essence" and that of "Concept," but he states them in the form of the one and the same "Doctrine of Concept": "1. In its immediacy—the concept-in-itself, 2. In its reflection and mediation—the being-for-itself and the shining [*Schein*] of the concept. 3. In its having returned back into itself and in its developed being-with itself—the concept in-and-for-itself."⁴ These three stages are therefore not isolated from each other. They all show that "only the concept is what is true."⁵ Essence as the mediation of existence and concept is the "reflection" of thought, that is, the concept's "being-for-itself." It is the negative moment of the concept, and the concept is by itself the negation of negation ("essence is the first negation of being, [...] the concept is the second negation, or the negation of this negation."⁶), that is, the reflection of reflection. But understanding (as mentioned above) is already an "external reflection." Thus, we see in Hegelian logic three reflections: the understanding's external reflection, the negatively rational "positing reflection" and the positively rational "determining reflection." The latter is no longer that incomplete determining reflection of the Doctrine of Essence but is instead reflection that has attained the concept and consequently that has sublated determining reflection, which is "speculation."⁷

Reflection as understanding

In the systematic arrangement of Hegel's *Logic*, general reflection starts with the understanding, which is different from what we saw when we discussed (in the previous section) the special meaning of reflection in the "Doctrine of Essence," where Hegel begins with "positing reflection" before entering the "external reflection" of the understanding. This difference in the order, in my opinion, reflects that Hegel's "Doctrine of Essence" is an "inverted world" in its own right, because after moving from the "Doctrine of Existence" to that of "Essence," the beginning of the latter is no longer immediacy, but is rather mediation and negation. "Being" itself becomes that which requires positing,

so it is not possible to deduce the “Doctrine of Essence” without beginning with posited reflection. In contrast, the beginning of Hegel’s entire *Logic* is immediacy and being, so the first kind of reflection must start with the reflection of the understanding and cannot immediately begin with the dialectical reason of the negatively rational.

Before Hegel defines reason as a higher way of thinking that is different from understanding, although there have been philosophers who also put reason above understanding (such as Plato), there is no major difference between reason and understanding. and people most often equate the two. Even today, when people label Hegel a “rationalist,” their interpretations are often based on the faculty of understanding. Müller, Kreines and the like typify this tendency.⁸ However, to call the understanding reason is certainly not groundless in a sense, because the understanding as a cognitive faculty effectively transcends sense data and representations of intuition. Even though the understanding does not fit the fourth (previous) sense of the concept of reason, it does conform to the third sense, that is, rational knowledge, which is different from sensuous knowledge. Therefore, the understanding fits the first and second senses of reason, that is, transcendence of animality, emotion and passion. So when Kant titles his epistemological work *Critique of Pure Reason*, although Hegel holds it to actually concern the understanding, he does not attack the title itself and instead uses the term reason in the broader sense. For example, in his “Lecture from the University of Berlin” in *The Book of Philosophy*, he calls on people to have trust in science and faith in reason, by which he means reason in the general sense. Furthermore, closer inspection reveals that reason is not strictly separable from the understanding, but instead holds a comprehensive position that includes the understanding as a moment within itself. So, observing the understanding from this standpoint is not only necessary but also rational. Thus, Hegel argues: “Therefore the common practice of separating understanding and reason is to be rejected on all counts.”⁹ He also directly calls knowledge of the understanding reason that acts as the understanding.¹⁰ Although the understanding is rife with partiality and shortcomings, the understanding does seek certain standards, universal laws and universal necessity from the ocean of empirical things, for which reason it transcends the immediacy of sensible intuition and makes the initial stage of reflection and the lower stage of reason.

Hegel’s attacks against the reflection of the understanding are well known, but what begs the question is why Hegel attacks the understanding in the first place? When engaging in such criticism, he often places a few qualifiers before the word “reflection,” among which the most commonly seen are “external reflection,” “subjective reflection” and “abstract reflection.” The most basic meaning that all three share is “abstraction,” namely in abstracting all of those disparate and manifold (sensuous) things from the subject’s representation of a current object and retaining the self-identical, universal being (in accordance with the law of identity). Hegel argues:

The understanding's activity generally consists in imparting the form of universality to its contents. More precisely, the universal posited by the understanding is an abstract universal which, as such, is maintained in opposition to the particular and by that very fact is determined at the same time to be itself a particular in turn.¹¹

Because such abstraction is the opposite of particularity and holds external universality, Hegel calls it "external reflection." Because such abstraction is performed by subjective acts of thought and because what is abstracted cannot be regarded as belonging to the nature of the particular object itself, Hegel calls it "subjective reflection" as well.

Clearly, the point of "abstraction" is to transcend sensuous particularity and rise up to universality, but because it stands in external opposition with this particularity, the universality of such abstraction does not include that particularity but simply excludes particularity, and therefore fails to attain true, all-encompassing (total) universality. Hegel's accuses "abstract understanding" for being unable to incorporate the particular into its own universality. "By relating to its objects by separating and abstracting [them], the understanding is the opposite of immediate intuition and sensation which as such deal with the concrete throughout and do not budge beyond it."¹² However, we must point out a conceptual ambiguity here. Hegel criticizes the understanding for abandoning the concrete content of sensation and intuition everywhere, but when does he himself propose returning to this sensible (representational) concrete? He does not! He insists precisely on the opposite:

What is felt and what is perceived by the senses is not what is spiritual, and that thinking is instead the innermost part of spirit and that only spirit is able to recognize spirit. Spirit may indeed also assume the form of feeling, as in religion, for instance. But, in general, feeling as such, i.e. the form of feeling, is one thing, while its content is quite another.¹³

Hegel does in fact return to the "concrete" at the stage of "reason," but this is no longer the concreteness of the sensibility; it is rather the concreteness of the concept (the concrete concept). In his view, the concrete factors of representation, that is, determinations such as "feeling, intuition, desire and will," have been excluded from philosophical thought once and for all by the abstract thought of the understanding. At the very most, they could serve as metaphors for "pure thoughts" or concepts and as rhetorical means for describing the entry into thought, but philosophy itself does not need them: "It can be said quite generally that philosophy replaces representations with thoughts and categories, but more specifically with concepts. Representations may generally be regarded as metaphors of thoughts and concepts."¹⁴ Hegel does make some analogies with representations like "pain," "impulse," "transparency," "bloodline," "life" (even though he also insists that life is the "Idea") and so on, but the entirety of his philosophy is grounded in logical, abstract

language (*logos*). Even when he is talking about concrete things of the sensibility and representation, his interpretation of them is made in the universal, abstract sense, while the concrete itself, for Hegel, remains the most meaningless and most untrue thing.¹⁵ When Hegel therefore returns from the abstract concept back to the sensuous and the intuitive, that is, when he returns to the concrete, he is actually just returning to the “concept” of these concrete things, or as Marx understood it, he is simply falling back into “abstract thinking” itself: “Nature is external to [this abstract thinking], it is self-loss; and it apprehends nature also in an external fashion, as abstract thinking—but as alienated abstract thinking.”¹⁶ Therefore, abstract thinking immediately pretends to be sensibility, reality, life.¹⁷ Abstraction is not only the foundation of Hegel’s philosophy but also the ultimate destiny and essence of what Hegel calls “concrete.” Hegel often deliberately conflates these two different kinds of concrete for the sake of playing the concreteness of sensibility off as if it were the concreteness of the concept.

Therefore, what Hegel’s accusation against the abstraction of the understanding actually implies is not that this abstraction has divorced from the concrete sensuous thing (he is no different from the abstraction of the understanding at this point). Rather, the accusation points to the failure of this abstraction to develop concrete concepts out of itself, out of abstract concepts and pure thoughts. The abstraction of the understanding cannot replace the concreteness of the representation with the concreteness of the concept. He claims to be logically deriving the entire empirical world of sensibility from the categories of thought, but what he actually does is derive a series of concepts about the world of objects from the most general and abstract concepts. Throughout this logical demonstration, the world of objects by itself still remains there in reality untouched, so this deduction itself is still for the objective world an external, subjective, deductive power—that is, the negativity that is inside of the concept—is still provided by the subjective transcendental standpoint, which is: the concept alone is substance and subject, while the sensuous object without concept is nothing more than an inexplicable subjective significance, so it is meaningless and should be ignored.¹⁸ For example, “its difference from nothing is a mere opinion [*eine bloße Meinung*].”¹⁹ This kind of reflection is shelved and forgotten merely because it is a difference in the pure sense, but Hegel presents another process of thinking them over that finds deeper determinations for being and nothing by considering them as two moments of “becoming.”²⁰ Clearly, the original mover behind this process of thinking them over that is the abstract concept’s motivation to derive itself is first obtained by externally and artificially negating and excluding the significations and the sensible object that they signify, which is done by the reflection that is “posited beforehand.” Even though such a reflection is explained in the “Doctrine of Essence,” it manifests in the “Doctrine of Existence” as a viewpoint brought to it from outside of itself. Only in this sense could we say that Hegel’s conceptual movement obtains impetus to move forward from outside of itself in the end. The reason why

Hegel's principle of moving development from abstract to concrete is so baffling to people is because he cannot explain how what is abstract in isolation from sensibility can still be that which is active and self-negating. On the one hand, he was begging people to put aside "implication" and only do abstract thinking, but on the other hand, he was complaining that people could not understand the concreteness of his category transitions; to this end, he appealed to their "representations" to explain the transitions, while still pointing blame at those representations: "that one fails to recognize the concept under discussion in any of those representations and that one does not know that they are examples of it."²¹ Yet, it was Hegel himself who "exiled" the empirical facts of nature to the explanatory notes.²² It seems such facts only had to be mentioned to satisfy the needs of average low-level readers. Contrary to this bashful strategy, Marx explicitly demands starting from human beings' sensuous actuality and regarding negation as a living sensuous movement of this very actuality itself, which for the first time broke free of the abstraction of the understanding and the abstractness of Hegelian reason and truly overcame the externality of reflection or thinking things over.

Of course, Hegel's critique of the abstract reflection of the understanding is still meaningful by itself in that in Hegel's opinion, reflection at the abstract stage of the understanding is incomplete; the understanding's transcendence over experience and immediate representation is ultimately incomplete, because after the understanding's abstraction derives universal concepts by way of dividing up (analyzing) sensuous objects, these universal concepts are themselves treated as finite, mutually unrelated objects in no way dissimilar from the singular empirical things of which they are abstractions. Thought (although at a higher level) once again falls back into the passive state of an animal without self-awareness, having lost both freedom and activity of mind. Hegel points out that the abstract concepts of the understanding are interpreted through this reflection-in-itself as a heaping pile of "different" singular things standing in opposition to one another *parts extra parts* while they are categorized and hierarchically differentiated by the external, subjective standard of the law of identity and fixed within a "black-and-white" framework. This approach is essentially still empirical, however, for—from how many concepts people have collected to the number of concepts in each category—all of this is purely contingent; they are mere "discoveries" that have been recorded in the history of science.²³ For this reason, even though each concept and category breaks away from the singularity of empirical facts and ascends to universality, this kind of infinite universality is still, however, regarded as a finite particular thing for treatment and processing. It cannot persist to reflectively transcend itself once again on a higher level; it cannot rise to the universality of concepts moving themselves and striving toward one common (universal) end; it cannot make universality include the particular and singular within itself and therefore become truly universal (all-encompassing) universality, the one and only universality. The universality of the understanding is merely an incomplete and superficial universality.

Therefore, Hegel's critique of the reflection of the understanding is not that of general reflection. Precisely to the contrary, it is an incomplete criticism of the reflection of the understanding that he cannot carry out all the way through.

Therefore, there are two types of reflection for the same categories, concepts or "reflective determinations" of the understanding: one is the reflection of the understanding; the other is "speculation." Speculation may include the reflection of the understanding and reveal the substantive content of such reflection, but the reflection of the understanding does not know that there is a way of thinking that is higher than itself nor is it conscious of its own contents and defects. The thinking of such understanding generally encompasses two factors, namely, mathematics and positive science (mechanics at the time), and being two different methods made it inevitable that the modern metaphysics of reason would give shape to two major irreconcilable schools, rationalism and empiricism, which were reconciled in Kant's philosophy. But these two paths are just different manifestations of the same abstract way of thinking. Far from transcending this way of thinking, Kant only pointed out its limitations, and when additionally presenting the juxtaposition of teleological thought and mechanistic conception of nature, he never thought of using teleology to reform the entire categorial system of mechanical oppositions, a step completed by Hegel. Hegel's logical system of categories is not dedicated to the collection of more categories but to rationally and speculatively understanding the current categories of the understanding, to making them "move fluidly" and "ignite," to showing their inner vitality. This is the relationship that Hegel's colorful example illustrates, namely that "the same maxim" means two different things for youth and adults.

Despite the different meanings of reflection, these categories and concepts are, after all, original. This is the major role that the reflection of the understanding has when forming rational speculation. Hegel insists that, "as far as knowing is concerned, it starts by apprehending the objects on hand in terms of their determinate differences."²⁴ "That the true content of our consciousness is preserved in its translation into the form of thought and the concept, and indeed only then placed in its proper light."²⁵ Rendering representation into thought, this first step is done by the reflection of the understanding. Representations involve the finite things of sensibility; the understanding processes finite objects and successfully elevates them in becoming infinite universals, and from this viewpoint, the understanding is indispensable, but it also treats what are essentially infinite universals as finite things, which puts itself in a difficult situation:

The understanding holds its reflection that the idea that is identical with itself contains the negative of itself (that it contains the contradiction) to be an external reflection, that does not fall to the idea itself. In fact, however, this is not a wisdom proper to the understanding. The idea is

instead itself the dialectic that eternally separates and distinguishes what is identical with itself from the differentiated [*Differenten*], the subjective from the objective, the finite from the infinite, the soul from the body and, only insofar as it does, is it eternal creation, eternally alive, and eternal spirit.²⁶

The understanding distinguishes and separates objects; it abstracts concepts and universals from representations, which is by itself a dialectical process of rational self-differentiation, a process that for the first time constructs the logical web of human knowledge: "here and there on this web there are knots, more firmly tied than others, which give stability and direction to the life and consciousness of spirit."²⁷ All knowledge (even the least perception and experience) starts with abstraction, without which human cognition has no chance of taking shape beyond the slightest sense-impression. But the abstract category should be regarded as objective and active essence, as the fire of life and river of destruction that transcends itself indefinitely, rather than as a finite framework that is imposed subjectively from the outside. This then demands reflection to stop not at the stage of the understanding but to rise up to a more advanced way of thinking, the stage of rational reflection. In fact, Hegel constructs the transition between categories and concepts by way of rational reflection in the "Doctrine of Existence." The entirety of the "Doctrine of Existence" in Hegel's *Logic* is a rethinking over those categories of metaphysics at the stage of the understanding, in particular, a rethinking over those categories used in mathematics and mechanistic physics, a rethinking over that which transforms them from a set of external, rigid determinations into the externalized expression of the free spirit of the concept. Here, Hegel constantly highlights the difference between this rational reflection and the external reflection of the understanding, and calls the reflection of the understanding "the bad practices of reflection" "and a reflection that is still philosophically unschooled,"²⁸ and "unfulfilled reflection."²⁹ For the reason that such reflection only sets out from established premises that are presupposed, "it casts its distinctions in them," in those abstract determinations.³⁰ As a transcending, it "is an abstract transcending which remains incomplete because the transcending itself has not been transcended."³¹ This "pre-supposed reflection" has never actually been posited, and because it has not reflected on the very premises of its own reflection, it remains "pre-supposed, posited as non-posited."³² For example, when dealing with the relationship of the finite to the infinite, "this unfulfilled reflection has before it both the determinations of the true infinite (namely the opposition of the finite and the infinite, and the unity of the finite and the infinite) but fails to bring the two thoughts together."³³ After all, the thought determinations "melted together," which is because "here we have, in a graphic example, the nature of speculative thought displayed in its determining feature: it consists solely in grasping the opposed moments in their unity."³⁴ The transition from finite to infinite is only secured in this way. Hegel, speaking of this transition,

insists that at this time, “it is such, however, for us, in our reflection; not yet as posited in it.” What has been posited is only a “noun”:

Any determinateness not yet posited in the concept itself belongs instead to our reflection, whether this reflection is directed to the nature of the concept itself or is a matter of external comparison. To remark on a determinateness of this last kind can only be for the clarification or anticipation of the whole that will transpire in the course of the development itself. That the whole, the unity of being and nothing, is in the one-sided determinateness of being an external reflection; but in negation, in something and other, and so forth, it will become posited. —It was necessary here to call attention to the distinction just given.³⁵

Such distinctions are particularly difficult to make because there is an intricate relationship of complications here: external reflection only pays attention to abstract nouns; it subjectively injects reflection’s distinction into these abstract determinations. However, even in the case of rational reflection, when clarifying the conceptual content and rational nature of these abstract determinations, such content at first can only be imposed by “us” from the outside, by “our reflection,” because these determinations still fall outside of consciousness in external reflection, and thus have never posited their own content. In other words, “we” are how external reflection is posited as the reflection of the object itself in the “Doctrine of Existence,” such that subjective reflection “first occurs in the sphere of essence, of objective reflection.”³⁶ Therefore, throughout the “Doctrine of Existence,” not only the reflection of the understanding is external, for even rational reflection must be given beforehand as presupposed, so it is external as well. However, the former is marked by externality thanks to the nature of reflection itself, while the latter is marked by externality due to the nature of the object of reflection. Because this object (existence) is by nature external, it stands in contradiction with rational reflection, from the perspective of which, existence can only be an illusion. Only in the final stage of the “Doctrine of Existence,” that is, “Measure,” reflection at the existence stage (external reflection) draws near to the reflection of rational essence:

Measure in its more developed, more reflected form is necessity [...] Measure is indeed an external way of things, a more or less, but one which is as at the same time reflected into itself, not merely an indifferent and external determinateness but one which exists in itself; thus it is the concrete truth of being [...] Already present in measure is the idea of essence [...] ³⁷ These moments are reflected.³⁸

It can only posit true self-reflection by sublating all moments of itself, which is the essence.

Therefore, only essence is real, fully developed and posited “objective reflection.” While at the stage of existence, reflection cannot escape its external, subjective fate. In a sense, it is arguably the totalizing demand of reflection itself that makes the reflection of the understanding in the “Doctrine of Existence” advance to the reflection of reason in the “Doctrine of Essence.”

Reflection as negative reason

Speaking of the understanding’s cognition, Hegel argues: “It is reason active as understanding [...] But in its external action, it stands under the guidance of the concept, and conceptual determinations make up the inner thread of the progression.”³⁹ This is the thought Hegel strives to clarify in the “Doctrine of Existence.” Inversely, we find in the “Doctrine of Essence,” in negative reason and dialectical reason, what he is facing is “the understanding active as reason.”⁴⁰ In *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, Hegel argues that if the understanding [also translated as “intellect”—Trans.] is treated as reason, then vice versa, reason will be treated as the understanding. Skepticism, Sophism, Kant’s “antinomies”—what Hegel tries to do is eliminate these external forms by which the understanding applies the dialectic of reason and penetrate into the self-negating and self-contradictory conceptual ground of reason so as to transition to positive reason. In this respect, Hegel points out two tendencies that should be overcome, one being skepticism, the other sophistry:

The dialectical, when taken in isolation by the understanding, constitutes scepticism.

Dialectic is usually regarded as an extraneous art that arbitrarily generates confusion among certain concepts and a mere semblance of contradictions among them.⁴¹

Dialectic itself should not fall into such applications by faculty of the understanding but should, on the contrary, express the essence of all reflections of the understanding: “In its distinctive determinateness, the dialectic is far more the proper, true nature of the determinations of the understanding, of things, and of the finite in general.”⁴² This is precisely the nature of “transcending.” The first transcending takes place in the reflection of the understanding:

Reflexion is at first a process of going beyond the isolated determinacy, i.e. a relating of it, whereby it is brought into a relationship, despite its being maintained in its isolated validity [...] The dialectic is, by contrast, this immanent process of going beyond [such determinacy] wherein the one-sided and limited character of the determinations of the understanding presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation [...] Thus, the

dialectical moment constitutes the moving soul of the scientific progression and is the principle through which alone an immanent connection and necessity enters into the content of science, just as in general the true, as opposed to an external, elevation above the finite resides in this principle.⁴³

But skepticism is the first step into the essence of existing things; it is in the same way a transcendence over the fixity of finite things insofar as it shakes up what the understanding believes are unshakably fixed. Although it is the understanding's application of reason, it is already the understanding's own negation and transcendence of itself, which already reveals reason's principle of self-negation. When reason contains skepticism in-itself as a moment (negative moment) of itself, when skepticism finds the legitimacy of itself inside of reason, skepticism reveals itself to be the substance of a higher-level reflection as the expression of "negative dialectic" in the form of "posited reflection." Therefore, "in fact only the finite, abstract thinking of the understanding that has to fear scepticism and cannot withstand it, whereas philosophy, by contrast, contains the sceptical within itself as one of its moments, namely as the dialectical."⁴⁴ Compared with the understanding, skepticism presents a higher stage of thought.

The chief labor of Hegel's "Doctrine of Essence" is arguably the logical and in-no-way forced deduction of the understanding's negation of itself by itself so as to overcome the partiality of the understanding and exercise the rational essence concealed within itself. This rational essence shines forth particularly in those pairs of categories reflecting each other, categories that people have been employing from the standpoint of the understanding without even the slightest bit of reflection in everyday life and (especially) scientific research on nature, often leading to antinomies, self-contradiction and irony within such fields. While those categories in the "Doctrine of Existence" still require "us" to externally reveal the dialectic inside of it, the categories in the "Doctrine of Essence" already reveal this dialectical nature by themselves, "in being, the form of relation is merely our reflection. By contrast, in essence relation is its [essence's] own determination."⁴⁵ Even the dullest of wits have felt the negative dialectic's all-encompassing, omnipresent and irresistible power. The question is how to look at it and accept it. Hegel insists that by looking at this negativity that transcends the understanding from the standpoint of the understanding, one will only see its negative effect but not that this effect is at the same time affirmative and positive, not that this process of negation is that of the creative development of life. The understanding only registers one thing after another that is brought into being and destroyed, and so it falls into despair, nothingness and sadness without seeing that what is newly brought into being is not the repetition of the old but something higher and more vital. The destruction of the old is not the total elimination of what has passed away without a trace but is rather the preparation made for bringing into being what is new, the very fiber of which it permeates. External reflection

alone is not sufficient by itself to reflect this point. External reflection (of the understanding) only reflects on the universality of thoughts or of universals from the standpoint of the object, but does not reflectively think-over again its active, self-negating (and thus truly universal) essence from the standpoint of this universality or reflect on the content of free creation and internal impulse contained in the abstract form of the categories. It is precisely this internal impulse of self-negation that breaks through all limitations of the finite object, that breaks up the external opposition of rigid categories and that builds itself and develops itself into the whole of the real world both alive and full of activity. Only dialectic, as truly posited reflection, grasps this inner essence of things and comprehends the ultimate ground of all things.

Here again we encounter a very subtle ambiguity in Hegel's terminology, and perhaps Hegel himself was the one who intentionally retained this ambiguity, but it nonetheless remains one to be clarified for the sake of better discussing Hegel's dialectic. This ambiguity concerns what the term "dialectic" in Hegel precisely means. Fulda points out that the term that Hegel himself uses to express the sense of "absolute knowledge" is not "dialectic" but "speculation." The term dialectic plays an important role in Hegel's terminological system, firstly in the article "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law" but also explained in the recorded lecture "Logic and Metaphysics" (Rosenkranz 1801/2 or 1802/3), where dialectic is the last part of the *Logic* but regarded as the preparatory stage for speculation; similarly, later in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, Hegel still regards dialectic as the rational side of logical negation, as the transition to speculative reason. Fulda goes on to criticize how ridiculous it is that the concept of dialectic has been treated as the sign that differentiates Hegelians from anti-Hegelians since Hegel entered the arena of public discussion.⁴⁶ For Fulda, the significance of Hegelian dialectic as a methodological program for philosophy is not found in the thought of reason reproducing itself nor in the preparatory subject of thought specifically named "dialectics" but simply in the insight that reason cannot reproduce itself with what is immediate or by aid of some sort of intellectual intuition, but in requiring the dialectic to become a moment of every method's normal procedure within speculative knowledge.⁴⁷ Dialectic is only a moment included within speculative knowledge as an intermediate mediation in the opposition against Schelling's rational intuition. It does not represent Hegel's all-encompassing methodology. From this, Fulda introduces the idea that dialectics only signifies "dialectical logic" in the narrow sense and enjoys no claim to ontology.⁴⁸ These viewpoints are very enlightening, but the conclusion is highly doubtful. Whether dialectical logic has the meaning of intellectual intuition, at what level it does or does not have this meaning, and the relationship between dialectic, dialectical logic and ontology will be discussed in Volume 3. Here we can take a preliminary look at the relationship between dialectic (dialectical reason) and speculative reason.

As Hegel sees it, Plato was the first to use the term dialectic, and he was indeed the first to explicitly propose dialectic as a philosophical method. Plato

absorbed Heraclitus's doctrine of "flux," the sophistry of the Sophists and especially Eleatic (Zeno's) thought about the intrinsically contradictory nature of movement, being and "one," but Hegel also points out that Plato molded his dialectic, fighting against and criticizing the other two forms of dialectic prior to him. What Plato first fought against was common dialectics, or the usual sense of dialectic, which was that of error.⁴⁹ Hegel here refers mainly to the Sophists, their sophistry. Of course, this dialectic of the Sophists:

is a dialectic that Plato has in common with the Sophists [...] The first concern of dialectic, or its effect so far, is to confound the particular, to refute its validity, since what gets exhibited is the finitude of the particular, the negation within it, the fact that it is conditioned, that it is not in fact what it is but passes over into its opposite—that it has a limit, a negation of itself that is essential to it.⁵⁰

This dialectic was "most necessary." Secondly, Plato combats, "the dialectic of the Eleatics." In actuality, the "dialectic" of the Eleatics was strictly the opposite of dialectic, that is, extreme metaphysics, another (absolutist) sophistry that was different from the relativist sophistry of the wise (the relationship between these two types of sophistry is comparable to that between Hui Shi and Gongsun Longzi in ancient China). However, the Eleatics did happen to explore and demonstrate the dialectical principle of negation, so Hegel believes that they were identical in essence to the Sophists. Hegel argues: "This dialectic is the movement of thought, an essential movement necessary [even] to the external mode or to reflective consciousness if the universal-what subsists in and for itself, or the immortal-is to be allowed to emerge."⁵¹ Hegel believes that by critically synthesizing these two aspects,

The dialectic that goes further than this consists in taking the universal that emerges from the confounding of the finite, in defining it within itself and resolving the antitheses within it. [...] the dialectic is Platonic in the proper sense; it is speculative dialectic because it does not culminate in a negative result [...] ⁵⁶ Plato's speculative dialectic—something that originates with him—is the most interesting but also the most difficult [element] in his work.⁵²

It should be clear that Hegel appreciates and absorbs mainly the speculative aspect of Plato's dialectic. By "speculative dialectics" Hegel means dialectic that is posited in the concept and Idea, the dialectical examination of pure thought itself.⁵³ This kind of dialectic is not simply the negating and "confusing" of representations and particular things but also the transcendence of such finite particularities, the affirmative revealing of the concept's (the Idea's) own negativity and movement of thought. The "theory of Ideas" that Plato brought into the world may have been the precondition of this revelation, because it placed bare or "pure" concepts excluding the representations

of sensibility before the activity of thinking, but conversely that inherent transcendence of dialectic itself over sensible things that made it possible for Plato to propose his theory of Ideas. In Greek, the term dialectic (διαλεκτικός) originally meant conversation, discrimination and deduction, a universal activity of communication undertaken at the linguistic and conceptual level. So, dialectic originally connoted an activity of the supersensible. Socrates's "midwifery" amounted to nothing more than guiding the speaker along the path of transcending the finitude of the sensible and rising to the universal. As Xenophon described it, whenever he himself discussed fully some theme he advanced by steps that gained general assent, holding this to be the only sure method grounded in a universal principle or an argument of unanimous agreement, by this process of leading back the arguments to the definition, even his opponent came to see clearly the truth.⁵⁴ Xenophon also states about the word "dialogue" (διαλεγέσθαι) that it comes from "sorting through" (διαλεγαντας) the nature of things with people gathering together and collectively discussing it.⁵⁵ The two Greek words stated above along with the word "dialectic" all come from the word διαλεγω, meaning discrimination, conversation and reasoning. It is only that, before Plato, the objects brought up for discrimination, conversation and reasoning were mostly sensible things. It was Socrates who began to elevate the discussion to concepts (virtue, knowledge, the good, justice, beauty etc.). Plato (especially in the later period) specifically used these concepts (Ideas) as the objects of discrimination, whereby the dialectical movement of thought is related to the universal.⁵⁶

Thus, Hegel insists that "this dialectic, which is designed to dissolve the particular and in so doing produce the universal, is not yet the authentic dialectic."⁵⁷ Hegel once called this sort of dialectic "formal, unsystematic," "that has an easy time picking up a variety of determinations here and there, and is just as at ease demonstrating, on the one hand, their finitude and relativity, as declaring." On the other hand, something "absolute" is proposed as the destiny of these determinations, "yet is incapable of raising either the positions or the negations to a true unity."⁵⁸ In Hegel's opinion, only speculative dialectic grounded in concepts and universals is "the true dialectic." In other words, Hegel's "reason" is the true "dialectical reason," and dialectic understood in this way is the only true method,

for it is the content in itself, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which moves the subject matter forward. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid that do not follow the progression of this method and are not in tune with its simple rhythm, for it is the course of the fact itself.⁵⁹

He declares that this is "the method that I follow in this system of logic, or rather the method that this system itself follows within."⁶⁰ Elsewhere, he argues that his dialectic is not that which "will blindly extend the opposite side." "The higher dialectic of the concept consists not merely in producing

and apprehending the determination as an opposite and limiting factor, but in producing and apprehending the positive content and result which it contains.”⁶¹

From the etymological point of view, the term “dialectic” did not originally mean “negative”; it only means sorting through and reasoning at the level of language. Only in practical usage did philosophers, especially the Sophists, appeal to the self-negating nature of things by way of linguistic analysis to come up with paradoxical conclusions such that dialectic became synonymous with sophistry and carried with it the idea of a negative result. Hegel exercises this traditional and conventional sense of the term in many places, treating “dialectical” and “negative” as equivalent terms. Hegel sometimes even follows Kant’s usage, describing dialectic as a method that leads to nothing but illusion as opposed to the “speculative” method.⁶² Despite this, Hegel derives his own understanding from his interpretation of Plato’s “speculative dialectic,” which follows the etymology of the “dialectic” in the sense that dialectical also means speculative. “It is in this dialectic as understood here, and hence in grasping opposites in their unity, or the positive in the negative, that the speculative consists.”⁶³ We can also see from Hegel’s interpretation of the term *Spekulation* that it coincides precisely with the original meaning of “dialectic.” Hegel points out that the word *Spekulation* in German originally meant speculation, conjecture and the actions that came about as a result, often referring to speculative activities in commerce,

Furthermore, the speculative is nothing else than the rational (the positively rational, that is) insofar as it is thought. In ordinary life, the expression speculation tends to be used in a very vague and at the same time subordinate sense, as, for instance, when one speaks of speculations concerning marriage or commerce. What is understood by such “speculation,” then, is merely the fact that, on the one hand, one should go beyond what is immediately; on the one hand and, on the other, what forms the content of such speculations is initially merely something subjective but should not remain so but instead be realized or translated into objectivity.⁶⁴

Obviously, “going beyond what is immediately” rises to “what is rational after undergoing thought,” and “speculating” or reasoning at this level (both Kant and Hegel refer to reason as a power that is distinct from the powers of the understanding and judgment) is precisely the original meaning of the term dialectic. As for what translating something subjective into objectivity means, we will discuss it in the next chapter, where we will see that this is also what Hegel means by “dialectic.”

When Hegel calls the second stage of his *Logic* “the dialectical or negatively rational,” to distinguish it from the third stage, “the speculative or positively rational,” he is mainly distinguishing dialectic from the traditional usage of the term in the history of philosophy. It is precisely because the original

intention behind the term dialectic had been so distorted and concealed for so long that Hegel came to use the term “speculation” to express that original intention of dialectic beyond the ordinary understanding of the term. Hegel did indeed hold reservations about the traditional and only partially understood “dialectic,” often reminding people to distinguish his dialectic from its usages by the faculty of the understanding from skepticism to Sophism, warning people not to rest with the merely negative result of the dialectic as is the case with skepticism and to see that it also causes a positive result.⁶⁵ On the other hand, however, he also insists that once this positive result is witnessed, people will already have already passed beyond the dialectical stage into the third stage, “namely of the speculative or positively rational.”⁶⁶ This means that at the stage of “the dialectical or negatively rational,” the positive result still is not clearly expressed, and consequently, the dialectic is only understood as negative and harbors the necessary tendency to become skepticism and Sophism—if it does not rise to the higher, speculative way of thinking. It is obvious that in the second stage of Hegel’s *Logic*, the “Doctrine of Essence,” the references to “negation” and “the negation of the negation” outnumber those in the “Doctrine of Existence” and far outnumber those in the “Doctrine of Concept.” He, moreover, reiterates that essence is pure negativity at the beginning.⁶⁷ However, it is no less obvious that the fundamental difference between negation on the one hand and skepticism and sophistry on the other, according to Hegel’s understanding, is that the object of this negation is no longer a finite representation or a singular thing, but is rather the concept possessing both universality and infinity, the concept that negates itself by virtue of its own infinity, not the finite object that is negated by something outside of it because of its own finitude. It is precisely due to the self-negation of the concept by itself that it does not encounter total destruction and obliteration like something finite would. The concept enriches itself by negating itself and transforms into the concrete concept, thereby generating the self-movement of the concept moving of itself, whose result is not purely negative but positive. Clearly, even at the stage of the negatively rational, Hegel looks at the negativity of the dialectic from the standpoint of the positively rational or of conceptual speculation as well. The work that Hegel strives to accomplish is to raise the reflective level of the dialectic to the speculative height.

The possibility of this heightening movement is already contained in the principles of Sophism and skepticism. Sophism reveals the relativity of all things and the essence of negating oneself and turning over into the opposite of oneself, which makes it possible for the dialectic to apply this principle to the concept itself and obtain a positive result. Skepticism (especially the noble skepticism of the ancients) illustrates that exposing the relativity and self-negation of all things is ultimately for the sake of maintaining the freedom of individual consciousness, although this freedom is only understood here as the inner undisturbed or “unmoving” mind. “Scepticism proper is the complete despair of anything solid in understanding and the attitude

that results from it is an unshakeable mind that rests in itself.”⁶⁸ This state of mind, as we analyzed earlier, is but a reverting back from “posited being” to self-reflection, “because of this reflection into themselves, the determinations of reflection appear as free essentialities, sublated in the void without reciprocal attraction or repulsion.”⁶⁹ This self-positing, but also external reflection, provides the ground for the higher level of “determinate reflection,” which is truly dialectical reflection. Thus, so long as this reflection takes the next step of transcending the externality of itself and does not view the world of self-negating appearances as having absolutely nothing to do with the freedom of one’s own inner mind, but instead as the active manifestation or externalization of one’s own freedom, as the shining from the subject’s self-determination or self-negation, this signals entry into “determining reflection.” It does not just reflect on the negativity of all appearances (posited reflection), nor does it think over all of this negativity coming from the subjective negativity of reflection (external reflection), but instead it further reflects on this subjective negativity (freedom) being the conceptual essence of the objective thing and on the negativity of the objective thing being the reflection of the essence of subjective freedom in-itself (self-reflection). Therefore, “reflection-into-other” and “reflection-into-self” are united; the self-negation of the objective thing becomes the true essence away from being an illusory appearance worthy of doubt. Contradiction is no longer the simple negation and cancellation of something, but the driving force behind something’s development. Freedom is no longer evading or being indifferent to something external and becomes the manifestation of the conceptual essence and inner vital activity of the external thing itself.

But, in this way, reflection also goes beyond the stage of essence and enters the “realm of freedom.” Those categorial determinations at the stage of essence are not free. Each has its own ground and is limited by other determinations, which “do not exist; it is posited only by the essence itself, not free but only with reference to the unity of the essence.”⁷⁰ At the stage of essence, the use of the negative dialectic has injected life into the categories from the standpoint of the concept and the positively rational, but this standpoint of the concept and the positively rational still has some sort of externality in relation to the category at this stage, because these categories themselves already have the self-negativity of transforming into their respective opposites and no longer have their essence revealed by external reflection like the categories of the “Doctrine of Existence.” But this clearly expressed self-negation always downslides into the mutual negation of a pair of categories instead of reaching identity in a third category. In fact, the strict syllogism of “thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis” in the “Doctrine of Essence” does not really say much at all, for, after entering the mutually opposing category pairs of the “Doctrine of Essence” from the moment of passing through “the ground,” the syllogistic progression basically only leaves us a form into which contents reluctantly take. For example, even in the revised *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, although the form is more rigorous,

it is not easy to see why “relationship” (*Verhältnis*) is the unity of “the world of appearance” with “content and form.” Is not “content plus form” already a relationship by itself? How would it find its “Truth” in “relation?” W.T. Stace also raises this question in *The Philosophy of Hegel*, pointing out that while exploring the relational categories in the “Doctrine of Essence,” “[i]t is doubtful here whether there is anything here but a dispute about terminology.”⁷¹ Stace could not see that Hegel wishes here to transition from the superficial level of appearance to the deeper levels, but could not yet find the appropriate moment for the transition, since this moment does not immediately emerge in the pairings of categories (like content and form), so it is too hard to find.

There are many other syllogisms in which the third term is not a positive “concrete concept” obtained by the negation of the negation, but is either the “dissolution” (*Auflösung*) of a category—for example, in the “Appearance” part, at the end of the “Existence” and “Appearance” sections, the third terms are “Dissolution of the Thing” and “Dissolution of the Appearance” respectively—or it is a relative relation (*Verhältnis*). For instance, “The Essential Relation,” “The Absolute Relation” and “Reciprocal Interaction” are the third terms of each syllogism. Even in the “Identity, Difference, Contradiction” part of “Unity of Opposites” (division of the *Science of Logic*), “contradiction” cannot be regarded as the unity of “identity” and “difference,” for it is only the intensification of the moment that is “difference,” which seems to explain why Hegel merges “contradiction” with “difference” in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, and instead uses “ground” as the third term.⁷² For this reason, Zhou Liquan insists that “in Doctrine of Essence, mutually opposed yet interrelated categories do not posit the unity between them.”⁷³

Of course, what the facts above illustrate is not that these categories do not have dialectically progressing essence, but only that they are different from the simpler categories of existence and the clearer categories of the concept. They not only have the penetrating depth of categorial relation; they are not only opaque, covering up and restricting each other, but they must also introduce the power of the concept to weave a thread of internal development (syllogistic progression) through these pairings of categories. Because of this, Hegel calls the “Doctrine of Essence” the most difficult part of the *Logic*, where “the sphere of the essence becomes a still imperfect combination of immediacy and mediation.”⁷⁴ Its syllogisms differ from the immediate transitions in the “Doctrine of Existence” and from the complete combination of immediacy and mediation into one development in the “Doctrine of Concept.” They are not (and let me borrow two terms from physics) “convergent” but rather “divergent.” In fact, in the “Doctrine of Essence,” since the starting point is no longer Being (positive), but is instead Nothing (negative), then the syllogism of this part can no longer maintain the form of “affirmation–negation–negation of the negation” but must instead be reversed into “negation–affirmation–negation of the affirmation,” that is, a transition from the

convergent model to the divergent model. Hegel's movement of what he calls reflection of essence is "from nothing to nothing and thereby back to itself," which seems to hint at a transition in the model of dialectical progression, because "the other which comes to be in this transition is not the non-being of a being but the nothingness of a nothingness, and this, to be the negation of a nothingness, constitutes being."⁷⁵ But after all, he does not raise this transformation to the importance of a change in the model of the syllogism itself. Instead, he calls the process of these two categories passing over into one another and mediating one another "a circle" without pointing out the difference between this circle and the circle of the usual syllogism. Strictly speaking, two categories cannot form a circle. A third category is needed to mediate the relative relation between the two parties to form a circle. Hegel once mentions Indian philosophy's principle of the trinity of "Brahma," saying "the determination of the Indian third principle is that it is the dispersal of the substantial unity into its opposite, not its turning back to itself."⁷⁶ He thinks this is "non-spiritual," however, strictly distinguishing it from his own method. Obviously, Hegel was not clearly conscious of his remodeling of the syllogism that he himself applies in the "Doctrine of Essence." Of course, the "divergent" or diffusive syllogism could still be regarded as "convergent" or concentrating on a deeper level. For example, we can also regard the movement of dissolution itself as a positive being (the habit of nominalizing verbs in Western languages makes this convenient). We could also see the "relation" itself as an independent category that differs from the two relata, but the finest of distinctions are required here to prevent confusing these two levels. Hegel does not explicitly make such distinctions, which makes us feel particularly uncomfortable when analyzing the categorial progression in the "Doctrine of Essence" according to the ordinary syllogistic formula of "thesis–antithesis–synthesis."

However, despite the many areas that are far from perfection and clarity, dialectical reason does prepare the ground for a higher form of dialectic in the "Doctrine of Essence" through reflecting on the concept's and the category's own intrinsic negativity. Such a dialectic truly understands the negative moment from the positive perspective and understands opposition from the standpoint of unity, thereby making what is external to one another and limiting one another melt within the transparent conceptual grip of comprehension. Such a dialectic is what Hegel calls *speculative reason*.

Reflection as the positively rational

In the negatively rational pure and simple, that is, in the "Doctrine of Essence," reflection does not ultimately come to completion. Even though this entire stage is determined as that of reflection, before entering the concept, such reflection is always incomplete, external and presupposed. Therefore, "The essence is the concept insofar as it is simply posited; in the essence, the determinations are only relative, they are not yet fully reflected in

themselves.”⁷⁷ In this sentence, “fully” (*schlechthin*) can also be translated as “absolute,” which means determinateness only becomes absolute self-reflection in the concept and this absolute reflection is speculation, that is, the positively rational. However, this kind of formulation is rarely seen in the *Science of Logic* (including the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*). Usually when he is talking about “reflection,” he is mostly referring to the external reflection of the understanding, which makes people wonder whether here Hegel just had a slip of the tongue or made a loose statement.

We discussed what Hegel means by “absolute reflection” at the end of the first chapter of this part, where we point out its relation to the concept, purpose and reason. We could also touch on some usages from Hegel’s earlier period to examine the various meanings of “reflection.” Perhaps, in this way we could help the reader more accurately understand the important role of reflection in the formal structure of Hegel’s *Logic* as a whole. Hegel states in the book *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (published in 1801):

Reflection in isolation is the positing of opposites, and this would be a suspension of the Absolute, reflection being the faculty of being and limitation. But reflection as Reason has connection with the Absolute, and it is Reason only because of this connection.⁷⁸

Hegel goes on to say that reflection is only reason when relating to the absolute, at which point reflecting is knowing, and moreover, “The intellect can also be directly attacked by Reason in its own realm. These attempts to nullify the dichotomy, and hence the absoluteness of intellect, through reflection itself are easier to understand.”⁷⁹ He also presents “absolute reflection” as the counter to “bad reflection,” which simply posits the opposite.⁸⁰ This usage of the word “reflection” is retained throughout his works until the *Science of Logic*. In brief, the usage of reflection in the general sense is not limited to the second stage of the *Logic*, but runs throughout the entirety of the *Logic*. He only begins to call that complete and absolute reflection “speculation” in the “Doctrine of Concept.” The thought of reflection being related to “the absolute” (i.e., substance) is also formulated in the *Logic*. Hegel states: “This infinite immanent reflection—that the being-in-and-for-itself is only such by being a positedness—is the consummation of substance. But this consummation is no longer the substance itself but is something higher, the concept, the subject.”⁸¹ The true absolute is not a passive substance but an active and free subject. To grasp this subject, the external reflection of the understanding is not enough, nor is the reflection posited by skepticism, for here, determining reflection is required, namely outwardly determining or reflection externalizing itself, but at the same time this amounts to infinite reflection in-itself. This is “speculation.” As mentioned, speculation is the conjecture or suspension in thought of the outward result of the subject’s action along with the

realization of this subjective conjecture whereby it passes over into objectivity; it truly has the nature of transcending the immediately present:

If the expression, the “objectifying deed of the ‘I,’” brings to mind other products of spirit, e.g. those of fantasy, it is to be observed that we are speaking of the determining of an intended object inasmuch as the elements of its content do not belong to feeling and intuition. The intended object is here a thought, and to determine it means both to produce it originally, and also, inasmuch as it is something presupposed, to have further thoughts about it, to develop it further by thinking.⁸²

Speculation is purposiveness. Speculation is ideal action, that is, action that is in harmony with the Idea and reason, which immediately relates it to the actual: “Since philosophy is exploration of the rational, it is for that very reason the comprehension of the present and the actual, not the setting up of a world beyond.”⁸³

In Hegel’s view, such a reflection or speculation is indeed “absolute.” It is precisely speculation that actively determined all prior categories, but as relative, external concepts without being for-itself. The reflection is “the concept considering it.”⁸⁴ The categories of existence and of essence are concepts,

But they are merely determinate concepts, concepts in themselves or, what is the same, concepts for us since the other (into which each determination passes over or in which it shines and is accordingly something relative) is determined not as something particular. Nor is the third factor determined as something individual or as a subject, which is to say that the identity of the determination is not posited in the determination opposite it, that its freedom is not posited, since it is not universality.⁸⁵

The categories in the “Doctrine of Existence” emerge as a single concept and are made to transition by external reflection. After transitioning, each category vanishes. The categories in the “Doctrine of Essence” emerge in pairings of concepts, that is, the form of judgment, the form of the relation between two concepts; they are also externally deduced by determinate reflection from one pair of categories into another pair and each pairing of categories similarly “vanishes” one by one through the deduction. Only upon entering the “Doctrine of Concept” does this measure of external reflection become the object that this reflection itself reflects upon. Namely, it becomes the absolute reflection of active self-determination; it turns around and sheds light on the externality and opaqueness of all prior categories and saves them from their “original sin:”

In the concept, therefore, the kingdom of freedom is disclosed. [...] Vanished is the obscurity which the causally related substances have for each other, for the originariness of their self-subsistence that makes

them causes has passed over into positedness and has thereby become self-transparently clear; the “originary fact” is “originary” because it is a “self-causing fact,” and this is the substance that has been let go freely into the concept.⁸⁶

The concept is the singular, the subject or “self-cause.” The concept is not the “many” concepts of the “Doctrine of Existence” or the pairings of concepts in the “Doctrine of Essence,” but the unique concept, the Concept, the pure substance and subject.

This active concept is the syllogism in its complete sense. “Thus the syllogism is the completely posited concept; it is, therefore, the rational. [...] Therefore, it is not just that the syllogism is rational but that everything rational is a syllogism.”⁸⁷ A concept is essentially of three moments; it is therefore the relation of three concepts and this relation is the syllogism. The syllogistic progression of the concept is only presented in the “Doctrine of Concept” by way of how the concept unfolds of itself and no longer only emerges singly or as pairs, which would require external reflection to explain and supplement it (as is the case in the “Doctrine of Existence” and the “Doctrine of Essence”). The three moments of the concept are universality, particularity and singularity. However, there is still a process to the concept for it to develop its own three moments: It first unfolds in the “subjective concept” into concepts (universals), judgments (particulars) and syllogisms (singulars) in the abstract, universal manner (of formal logic); it then unfolds in “objectivity” into the mechanical (universal), the chemical (particular) and the purposive (singular); finally, it unfolds as life (universal), understanding (particular) and absolute concept (singular) in the “Idea” in singular (that is concrete) fashion.⁸⁸ The three moments of universality, particularity and singularity of concepts are the three moments of absolute reflection in the whole “Doctrine of Concept,” which is to say, absolute reflection is the unity of reflection in its other and reflection in itself. In Hegel’s words:

As negativity in general, that is, according to the first immediate negation, the universal has determinateness in it above all as particularity; as a second universal, as the negation of negation, it is absolute determinateness, that is, singularity and concreteness [...] In so far as the universal possesses determinateness, this determinateness is not only the first negation but also the reflection of this negation into itself [...] For this determinateness, as it is in the concept, is the total reflection—a doubly reflective shine, both outwards, as reflection into the other, and inwards, as reflection into itself.⁸⁹

When universal determinateness is applied externally to “Objective Logic” (the “Doctrine of Existence” and the “Doctrine of Essence”), it is still only abstract universality such that it is still only contingent with respect to its subject matter (object). Only in “Subjective Logic” or the “Doctrine of Concept”

does it become “the concept’s own self mediation, its own immanent reflection.”⁹⁰ The universal becomes the particular universal, that is, the singular.

In the concept, the singular is also a universal, that is, a concrete universal, a universal containing the particular within it. Unlike “abstract” universals, it is truly universal because it contains the particular. Inversely, the abstract universal is by itself a particular, because it does not possess the greatest universality that contains the particular within it, but instead excludes the particular from itself and externally opposes the particular, making itself into a singular among all singulars. “These products of abstraction also, though they are supposed to drop singularity, are rather themselves singulars.”⁹¹ According to this interpretation, universality, particularity and singularity share lifeless external relations to one another, “For abstraction keeps singularity away from its products, and singularity is the principle of individuality and personality. And so it comes to nothing but lifeless universalities, void of spirit, color, and content.”⁹² Inversely, the universal posited by the particular is concrete, that is, singular, and this kind of singular or true universality is the subject of self-activating life, “personality” and freedom. In Hegel’s ordinary progression (namely “convergent” model) of thought, the singular is always the third item, the negation of the negation:

Just as that with which we began was the universal, so the result is the singular, the concrete, the subject; what the former is in itself, the latter is now equally for itself: the universal is posited in the subject. The two first moments of triplicity are abstract, untrue moments that are dialectical for that very reason, and through this their negativity make themselves into the subject.⁹³

Of course, this normal model gets deformed at times, which means that when the problem is not one of actively externalizing oneself actively and positing the “other” of oneself, but one of dissolving what is other to oneself and returning to oneself from this other, the process of thought is not universal, particular and singular (affirmation, negation, the negation of the negation), but is instead reversed into singular, particular and universal (negation, affirmation, negation of the affirmation). We have already pointed out this reversal in the “Doctrine of Essence.” Here we also want to explain that there are some transitional models between this reversal and anti-reversal. In principle, the three moments may generally have six different combinations, plus three moments in each moment, which gives Hegel enough models to deduce the “Doctrine of Concept,” especially the progressing thought of deducing each case and each kind of judgment from formal logic in “the subjective concept.”

However, in general and in essence, the “convergent” model of thought is the core model of Hegel’s *Logic*. The concrete concept only comes into possession of self-activity and freedom by subsuming the universal and particular forms of the singular in the form of the individual and subject. “Everything is a concept, by this means and as negative reflection-in-itself,

makes itself something individual.”⁹⁴ Of course, just as we want to distinguish the concreteness of the concept from the concreteness of the appearance (sensibility), we should also distinguish the singularity of the concept from the singularity of the sensibility.⁹⁵ The self-activity and freedom of this individuality consist in the following: the singular is a self-synthesizing of the singular with the universal, which integrates the universal and the negative of itself that is the particular medium. It is consequently the unity of these two moments (universal and particular, or positive and negative). This unity is not binding two present things together but is rather the negation of the negation of one and the same thing. So, it (the singular) is absolute negation, “but, as absolute negativity, the negative moment of absolute mediation is the unity which is subjectivity and soul.”⁹⁶ Since this unity (the singular) itself has two moments, it can externalize one of its moments, that is, particularity (as a means, a mediation) at any time; this externalization is not blind or forced but is carried out according to another moment of its own, namely the universal moment: in this way, the singular manifests as an independent, free and autonomous subject and its activity is active, purposive activity.

It is grounded in this active working of the subject known as singularity that Hegel’s “Absolute Idea” finally “relinquishes” nature: “in the absolute truth of itself, resolves to release freely from itself the moment of its particularity or the first determining and otherness, the immediate idea, as its reflection [*Widerschein*], itself as nature.”⁹⁷ In the *Science of Logic*, this is what it says: “The idea, namely, in positing itself as the absolute unity of the pure concept and its reality and thus collecting itself in the immediacy of being, is in this form as totality—nature.”⁹⁸ Since Ludwig Feuerbach, this conclusion of Hegel’s *Logic* has been relentlessly attacked for being the archetypical case of idealism deducing objective world from concepts. However, Lenin greatly appreciated this, insisting that Hegel’s statement was highly “noteworthy,” “the transition of the logical idea to nature. It brings one within a hand’s grasp of materialism.”⁹⁹

The sum total, the last word and essence of Hegel’s *Logic* is the dialectical method—this is extremely noteworthy. And one thing more: in this most idealistic of Hegel’s works there is the least idealism and the most materialism. “Contradictory,” but a fact!¹⁰⁰

Of course, Lenin only mentions Hegel’s “materialism” from the standpoint of turning Hegel upside down. But there is one point that has not received enough attention so far, which is: Hegel’s thought of the logical Idea externalizing into Nature is not one that he stumbled upon accidentally, but is the consistent thought running throughout his *Logic* in every stage, syllogism and category. M.F. Ovsyannikov insists that when Hegel speaks of the externalization of the Absolute Idea into nature, he does not trouble himself with any argument, which gives us reason to assume Hegel could never totally shake off the influence of Romanticism and irrationalism, and moreover, at times

he also makes use of that method of argument he once ironically compared to shooting a pistol.¹⁰¹ This opinion is superficial. First of all, he does not see that the externalization of the Idea in Hegel is the necessary deduction resulting from the concept's self-activated negation of itself by itself, which Hegel continually explains and proves from the beginning to the end of the *Logic*. The reason why Hegel does not need to supply a specific "argument" is simply because he supplies arguments everywhere. For example, someone who has understood "the determinate being (Dasein) or existence exists for itself" or "the ground of identity and difference," especially someone who has understood the transition from the theoretical Idea to the practical Idea, will without hesitation accept the rationality of "the Absolute Idea" externalizing as Nature. Secondly, Ovsyannikov also underestimates the impact of Romanticism and irrationality on Hegel, because this impact is in reality far from some residual; it makes up an essential moment of Hegel's dialectic, that of the spirit of *nous* negating itself, which relies on the spirit of *logos*, that is, the moment of reflection, to break out of the limitations of Schelling's "pistol shot" style of argument and to fuse it into the circular logical progression that links together beginning to end, but it remains a prominent feature of Hegel's dialectic. Therefore, casting blame on the logical Idea externalizing as nature in the final stage is equal to casting blame on the concept negating itself at each stage of the *Logic*. Assuming that simply turning Nature back around so that it stands before the *Logic* would be enough to realize the materialist reversal of Hegel's idealism amounts to an empty fantasy (although no one in fact does this, people do concentrate their attacks on the end of the *Logic*, which certainly hints in this direction). Hegel's reversal is not correctable by chopping off the head and tail, for this reversal is made in principle and courses through the very bone and marrow of the *Logic*. The dialectical and materialist thought expressed through this reversal still remains for us to uncover.

The singularity of the concept (the concrete concept) or the synthesis of the previous concepts is the thought of the union of two moments, that of the universal and that of the particular, which is an example of that which remains for us to explore further. Usually when people discuss the law of the unity of opposites in the dialectic, they understand unity as the interdependence, interpenetration and inseparability of two opposites passing over into one another, but only few understand it as the singular, as individuality, personality and freedom. Few understand it as the movement of life with the power of the negative. Most believe this "unity" is merely the particular, temporary state of two present things in a relation; it either emerges as the alteration of opposite sides "struggling" against one another and as the temporary reconciliation and calming of the contradiction,¹⁰² or it is merely the superficial appearance of the substance that is struggling underneath it. This has led to the emergence of a long-lasting popular misunderstanding of Hegel's dialectic, which is that Hegel sublates and reconciles his contradictions in the third moment, which is a sign of thinking that his dialectic is "incomplete"

and ultimately falls into metaphysics. Such a misunderstanding misses the point that “unity” in Hegel does not mean (or predominantly does not imply) balance, identity, rest or even interdependence, interpenetration and passing over into one another in the first place, for unity is instead the subject’s active synthesis and unification of each of its moments, which unfolds as the subject negating itself; in other words, the subject can only negate itself solely because it can unite its moments; if the subject cannot unite itself, it would fall prey to division and dismemberment and fail by itself to concentrate the forces necessary to negate itself. Union is negative union, not static and abstract union. Although Hegel himself frequently uses the term “unity,” he often expresses strong dissatisfaction with the term for the reason that it is prone to the misunderstandings just mentioned. He argues:

Because the idea is (a) a process, the expression “the unity of the finite and infinite, of thinking and being, and so on,” as an expression for the absolute, is false, as often noted. For this unity expresses an abstract, calmly enduring identity. The expression is likewise false because the idea is (b) subjectivity, since that unity expresses the in-itself, the substantial dimension of the true unity. The infinite thus appears as only neutralized relative to the finite, and so too the subjective relative to the objective, thinking relative to being. But in the negative unity of the idea the infinite reaches over and beyond the finite, as does thinking over being, subjectivity over objectivity.¹⁰³

For example, what is alive is just such a unity:

An individual determinateness becomes the sensation of something negative, because, qua alive, they carry within themselves the universality of the living nature that is beyond the individual, they maintain themselves even in the negative of merely themselves and feel this contradiction as it exists within themselves. This contradiction is in them only insofar as both exist in the one subject, namely the universality of its feeling for life.¹⁰⁴

Hegel insists that the shortcoming in the word “unity (*Einheit*)” is that it emphasizes identity over difference, “a speculative determination” “is supposed to be articulated in the difference.”¹⁰⁵ For example, “it is not only the unity of being and nothing, but the unrest in itself”; the unity “is within itself against itself” and so on.¹⁰⁶

The most thought-provoking is Hegel’s explanation of “the ground.” Hegel insists that every determination, every concrete thing, every concept contains differences, and these differences essentially pass over into contradiction, and what is contradictory must, of course, dissolve and return back to its negative unity. Things, subjects and concepts are all as such negative unities; it is by itself a contradiction in-itself but also a contradiction that has been resolved;

it is the ground, but this ground contains and shoulders its determinations.¹⁰⁷ “If it is said of the ground ‘it is the unity of identity and difference’, then by this unity is not to be understood the abstract identity,—but just as much the difference of the identity and the difference.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, it is the singular and the individuality (identity and difference are universality and particularity), and as individuality, it is “negative unity,” or resolved contradiction; however, to resolve here does not mean to disappear but to contain and bear the contradictory determination of itself within itself. The singular, the subject, bears its own contradiction not by passively accepting it but by actively grasping it, which is itself a new contradiction:

By this means, the ground, which first presented itself to us as the sublation of the contradiction, thus appears as a new contradiction. But as such it is not something persisting [*Beharrende*] peacefully in itself but rather the repelling [*Abstoßen*] of itself from itself [...]¹⁰⁹

Hegel also argues:

Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself: indeed, force is this, to hold and endure contradiction within. [...] if it were not capable of harboring contradiction within it, it would not then be a living unity as such, not a ground, and in contradiction it would founder and sink to the ground.¹¹⁰

Clearly, what Hegel calls unity of contradiction first of all means negative unity, the singular, the process of the movement of life, in which the singular grasps the contradiction and maintains it in itself as its own negative motivating force. This is what Hegel means by the sublation, reconciliation and resolution of contradiction. The resolution of contradiction is the contradiction actually becoming the source of movement and development. This resolution is precisely what distinguishes the dialectical method from sophistry, for without resolving, the contradiction will only dissolve into nothing. Contradiction is not dialectic, but the resolving of contradiction is. As J.N. Findlay points out, Hegel does not think that the harmony that rational knowing attains implies that contradiction and disharmony are eliminated in dialectical thought; such discord is indeed to be overcome, for Hegel, but to overcome is at the same time to eternally preserve. The overcoming of the contradiction and the irrational always entails preserving it, because contradiction is considered to be essential for rational knowledge in the end.¹¹¹ Aside from the one problem of confusing the contradictory with the irrational (since contradiction in Hegel is not irrational but instead fully rational), Findlay’s understanding is correct. In its progression, the contradiction does not abstractly vanish, but is resolved and reconciled, and the positive truth is this self-moving unity.¹¹² Reconciliation implies that the two sides of the contradiction have not eliminated each other, but that they maintain the tension

of their relation to one another, bringing about movement and life, and this process of movement, this grasping and maintaining of the contradiction, is impossible to understand without the subject of movement that is singularity.

Hegel's emphasis on singularity and the concrete concept makes up the most important feature of positively rational reflection. In the "Doctrine of Existence," the reflection of the understanding is external, and the objects it reflects are abstract and isolated universal concepts. Even though Hegel argues that becoming is the first concrete thought and consequently the first concept, he does not argue it is the first concrete concept.¹¹³ In the "Doctrine of Essence," each concept is determined by another concept as each regards the other as a particular component of itself, such that the concept becomes the universal concept of reflection into self and the particular concept of reflection into another, but universal and particular, self-reflection and reflection in another are still related externally and constantly exchanging positions with one another without ever melting into one or unifying in the third term, that is, the singular concept as the concrete, which is to say, when the universal concept treats the particular (through the copula "to be") as its own predicate, it remains an abstract universality and consequently another particular. Only at the end of the "Doctrine of Essence," in "Reciprocal Interaction," does necessity as the particularization of the universal become freedom and contingency as the universalization of the particular become one and the same freedom such that self-reflection and reflection in another become "the same reflection."¹¹⁴ In this way, particularity becomes the intermediary that mediates the transition from the universal to the singular: "This, their simple identity, is the particularity that, from the singular, holds the moment of determinateness; from the universal, that of immanent reflection—the two in immediate unity."¹¹⁵ The universal, particular and singular—each contains the other, each is one and the same totality, and consequently, this totality is the most universal, but at the same time, the singular, the one and only, whose differences are completely transparent and do not disturb one another, which is the concrete concept.¹¹⁶

The concrete concept as the positively rational reflection that has been negated undergoes further reflection upon the mutual reflection and mutual negation of these abstract determinations on the foundation of the reflection of the understanding abstracting from and breaking free of the sensible world. Finally the concrete concept thinks over again or re-reflects upon this mutual negation arising from the self-negation of all things and all determination; this mutual negation emerges from the individual activity or "negative unity" of the identical. People regard the instability of these thought-determinations as their own negative freedom, which is the reflection of the hopeless mindset of doubt and indifference, that is, negatively rational reflection. When one regards the negative unity of such thought-determinations as one's own positive freedom, which is the reflection of active creation and living movement, that is positively rational reflection. These three kinds of reflection are in line with the original meaning of the word "reflection," that is, the images of

human beings themselves reflected in the mirror, but each reflection is deeper than the last until the final reflection, which advances into the sphere of free will, practical action and the good from that of pure knowledge and science. "Inasmuch as the concept, which is its own subject matter, is determined in and for itself, it is the impulse to realize itself."¹¹⁷ But here, Hegel tries as much as possible to avoid this humanistic interpretation of reflection (although he is actually coming from this interpretation). In his view, reflection is not the reflection of "man" or "human being" at the very beginning, but that of non-human "spirit" or of reason itself; the singularity and "personality" of the concept are not those of the human being either. It is then not difficult to understand why Hegel does not immediately advance to "nature" after advancing into "the Idea of the Good" or "the will," but instead boils them back down again to "the Absolute Idea." This fully exhibits the pantheistic tendency in the natural philosophy of Hegel's *Logic*: only absolute spirit, God, possesses the active creativity to externalize (or create) Nature, and such creation does not immediately arise from the good or from the will but from the necessity and "deduction" of the logical Idea; it sublates the (human being's) singular goodness and will as a stage of universal and absolute knowing.

The concept is not only soul, but free subjective concept that exists for itself and therefore has personality—the practical objective concept that is determined in and for itself and is as person impenetrable, atomic subjectivity—but which is not, just the same, exclusive singularity; it is rather explicitly universality and cognition, and in its other has its own objectivity for its subject matter. All the rest is error, confusion, opinion, striving, arbitrariness, and transitoriness; the Absolute Idea alone is being, imperishable life, self-knowing truth, and is all truth.¹¹⁸

Of course, this universal knowing also has its own singularity and subjectivity; otherwise, it would not have the power to "decide" to freely externalize itself into nature, but the ground of this "decision" or "impulse" to sublate subjectivity is given in the "Idea of the good" and even in "the Idea of life," while the Absolute Idea by itself only provides the means or "pure method" for the realization of this decision or impulse. That is, God's creation of the world is not lawless but has its own method (analysis, synthesis etc.); however, God's impulse or will to create the world is still demonstrated in the living and good will, which is analogous to the practical activity and free creative movement of human beings. Hegel's theological viewpoint is obviously colored by anthropomorphism, just as Feuerbach argues that Hegel's absolute spirit is nothing but abstract, namely finite spirit divorced from himself.¹¹⁹

However, since Hegel's Absolute Idea as pure method is determined as the unity of knowledge and practice, of the true and the good, it reveals the internal structure of positively rational reflection in Hegel's philosophy, which demonstrates that this absolute reflection is nothing other than the unity of the spirit of *nous* that negates itself and the spirit of *logos* that reflectively

transcends. So, method has this important meaning here, which is first of all ontological:

The concept is all, and that its movement is the universal absolute activity, the self-determining and self-realizing movement."¹²⁰ It is "free of restrictions, and as the absolutely infinite force," "it is therefore soul and substance," "it is both the manner of cognition, of the concept subjectively aware of itself, and the objective manner, or rather the substantiality of things—that is, of concepts as they first appear as others to representation and reflection. It is therefore not only the highest force of reason, or rather its sole and absolute force, but also reason's highest and sole impulse to find and recognize itself through itself in all things."¹²¹

Secondly, method also has its own particular methodological significance:

As the concept was considered for itself, it appeared in its immediacy; the reflection, or the concept considering it, fell on the side of our knowledge. The method is this knowledge itself, for which the concept is not only as subject matter but is as its own subjective act, the instrument and the means of cognitive activity, distinct from this activity and yet the activity's own essentiality.¹²²

This relative distinction between method and object is reflection, that is, the consideration of the concept (as substance) by itself (as method); that is, the concept of transcending the concept, the thought of thought or "speculation." As we have said before, reflection in Hegel is nothing more than the expression of the positive aspect of his principle of self-negation. Thanks to negating itself, reflection continually transcends the already affirmed and the immediacy of the concept as it climbs higher to new elevation of affirmation and concept; it makes the active obtain its own determination and consequently becomes the power of the absolute; it becomes not blind but rational activity of determination with the effective tools and means to realize itself self-realizing.

In this way, the absolute reflection that Hegel previously applied in the "Doctrine of Existence" and the "Doctrine of Essence" as an external explanation and presupposed method obtains its final ground here. It finally demonstrates that itself is not the subjective force of arbitrary decision, but is really the conceptual nature that runs throughout the categories of existence and essence, even though existence and essence do not immediately show this conceptual nature; this is not the fault of the concept itself, however, but is owing to the fact that objective logic is only a set of finite or unreal categories, which are not adorned with the predicate of absolute Truth and consequently are only moments vanishing away in the concept; they are categories that only obtain their true image and accurate interpretation in the Doctrine of Concept.

Notes

- 1 Peking 1961, 135.
- 2 Ibid., 107.
- 3 Ibid., 125; italics in original.
- 4 Ibid., 134.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., 526.
- 7 Hegel 1991, 33, 132.
- 8 For example, the interpretations given by Müller, Kroner, Struth, etc. See (Song 1989, 121).
- 9 Hegel 2010, 540.
- 10 Hegel 2010, 292.
- 11 Hegel 1991, 126.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., 49.
- 14 Ibid., 30, 31.
- 15 Ibid., 53.
- 16 Marx & Engels 1988, 147.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Hegel allegedly did not even visit his close friend Hölderlin after he went mad, which is quite telling. Gulyga commented on this, saying that Hegel advocates for the supremacy of reason such that if a person were to lose reason, in Hegel's opinion it would mean that person would be dead. See (Gulyga 1980, 23).
- 19 Hegel 1991, 139.
- 20 Ibid., 142.
- 21 See Lenin 1976, 127.
- 22 Hegel 2010, 85–6.
- 23 Ibid., 194.
- 24 Hegel 1991, 126.
- 25 Ibid., 32.
- 26 Hegel 1991, 286.
- 27 Hegel 2010, 17.
- 28 Ibid., 89.
- 29 Ibid., 120.
- 30 Ibid., 89.
- 31 Ibid., 113.
- 32 Ibid., 136.
- 33 Ibid., 120.
- 34 Ibid., 122.
- 35 Ibid., 84.
- 36 Ibid., 94.
- 37 Ibid., 285.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Hegel 2010b, 292. In the book *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, he once argued that if you treat the understanding as reason, you will inversely treat reason as the understanding. See (Song 1989, 105).
- 40 Hegel 2010b, 292.
- 41 Ibid., 128.

- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 129.
- 44 Ibid., 131.
- 45 Ibid., 172.
- 46 See (Fulda 1978, 36–7).
- 47 Fulda 1978, 37.
- 48 Ibid., 39–40.
- 49 Hegel 2006, 199.
- 50 Ibid., 197.
- 51 Ibid., 199.
- 52 Ibid., 198.
- 53 Ibid., 199.
- 54 Judson & Karasmanis 2006, 14.
- 55 Ibid., 11.
- 56 Hegel 1892, 200.
- 57 Ibid., 197.
- 58 Hegel 2010, 466.
- 59 Hegel 2010, 33.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Hegel 1991b, 305.
- 62 Hegel 2010, 520.
- 63 Ibid., 35.
- 64 Hegel 2010b, 132–3.
- 65 Ibid., 131.
- 66 Ibid., 132.
- 67 Hegel 2010, 508.
- 68 Hegel 2010b, 131.
- 69 Hegel 2010, 352.
- 70 Ibid., 339.
- 71 Stace 1955, 10.
- 72 Zhou Liqun argues, “in the Doctrine of Essence, placing categories in opposition and relation to one another does not posit unity between them” (see Zhou 1989, 59). This is far from accurate. It should be said that such unity is only external in the “Doctrine of Essence” and only becomes fully internal in the “Doctrine of Concept.”
- 73 Zhou 1989, 59.
- 74 Hegel 2010b, 176.
- 75 Hegel 2010, 346.
- 76 Ibid., 284.
- 77 Hegel 2010b, 173.
- 78 Hegel 1977, 95.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Song 1989, 130–1, 160.
- 81 Hegel 2010, 511.
- 82 Ibid., 41.
- 83 Hegel 1991b, 196.
- 84 Hegel 2010, 737.
- 85 Hegel 2010b, 235.
- 86 Hegel 2010, 531.

- 87 Ibid., 588.
- 88 Hegel believes that the Idea of life in its immediacy “has singularity for the form of its concrete existence” (Hegel 2010, 675), but what he calls life does not refer to life in immediate existence but to that in the logical Idea: “Life, considered now more closely in its Idea, is in and for itself absolute universality; the objectivity which it possesses is throughout permeated by the concept” (Hegel 2010, 678). Thus it is universality unfolding in singular fashion.
- 89 Hegel 2010, 532–3.
- 90 Ibid., 532.
- 91 Ibid., 546.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid., 747.
- 94 Hegel 2010b, 254.
- 95 Ibid., 237.
- 96 Hegel 2010, 746.
- 97 Hegel 2010b, 303.
- 98 Hegel 2010, 752.
- 99 Lenin 1976, 233.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Stace 1955, 204.
- 102 Yang 1986, 146; Zhang 1981, 152.
- 103 Hegel 2010b, 287.
- 104 Ibid., 107.
- 105 Ibid., 143.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Hegel 2010, 69–70.
- 108 Hegel 2010b, 187.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Hegel 2010, 382.
- 111 Findlay 2013, 77.
- 112 Hegel 2010, 122.
- 113 Hegel 2010b, 143.
- 114 Hegel 2010, 504.
- 115 Ibid., 505.
- 116 Hegel 2010b, 231.
- 117 Hegel 2010, 729.
- 118 Ibid., 735.
- 119 Feuerbach 1959, 104.
- 120 Hegel 2010, 737.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 Ibid., 737.

6 The logical function of reflection

So far, our investigation of Hegel's concept of reflection has only analyzed the various forms of reflection, their mutual relationship and their relationship to negation, but the logical function of Hegel's reflection in the deduction of his logical categories has not been specifically investigated. One could say that Hegel's reflection is the "form" of his dialectics. So, how does it "shape" Hegel's dialectics? In other words, how does reflection regulate the active impulse of self-negation and concentrate it on the outside as an externally expressive force? What kind of logical function does it embody? The form of Hegel's dialectic is "logical," which turns it into a system and simultaneously a method that is understandable and teachable, but the logical form of Hegel's dialectic is not formal logic, for it must appeal to human beings' innermost activity and "sense" to be truly understood and imparted. It does not allow human beings to sit back and enjoy the functioning of timeless norms and eternal laws; it is a logic of "transcendence" and therefore has a transcendent logical function. We can work through such a function by distinguishing three levels in it, namely the function of reversing, that of necessity and that of synthesis.

Reflection and inversion

When we talked about the method of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we pointed out the "leverage" that the linguistic act of reversing has over the *Phenomenology*, arguing that this reversing lever is not that around which the entire system of the *Logic* turns. The *Logic* employs the lever of negation, not reversal (see Volume 1, Part 2, Chapter 3), but this does not mean that there are no reversals in the *Logic*. On the contrary, inversion, reversal, though not the lever of the *Logic*'s system, still plays an indispensable role as a most important formal law. It is not a principle that pushes the system forward, but rather a law of the movement of the concept that it gains certainty and determination at each stage. In addition, the origin of this reversal, as the reversal of reflection, is linguistic, but at this point it sheds the externality of language and becomes the reversal of the pure concept. In other words, it is no longer the reversal of language and signification, but is instead the reversal

of subject and predicate (sense) inside of language itself.¹ We also spoke of the thing in-itself, or the “crux of the matter” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* along with its different moments as related by mutual inversion of subject and predicate or mutual inversion of one category and another as the negative category of this category, but such an inversion happens twice at every stage, namely as “the reversal of the reversal,” but that is merely a loaned formulation. Within the *Phenomenology*, “the crux of the matter,” or the thing in-itself as the “subject” is still only an inner “yearning” both unrealized and unspoken, a mere “meaning” to be realized and that is all. We have to return to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and more closely examine Hegel’s doctrine of “the inverted world,” because as we mentioned earlier, the *Phenomenology*, as the prototype or outline of Hegel’s philosophy, already includes applications of the *Logic*’s principle.

Hegel’s doctrine concerning “the inverted world” is found mainly in the “Force and the Understanding” section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he analyzes the inner essence of “force” and the passage over into “the infinite.” Hegel insists the understanding makes an abstraction of the qualitatively diverse sensuous world, from which the understanding derives the essential law of “force” beyond the phenomenal world of appearance. This is the formation of the “supersensible world,” but the understanding also discovers a “second law” in this supersensible world of pure law, that is, the law of “the alteration” of forces and of the self-negation of everything that is settled by the understanding, or the law of differing from oneself and of altering into the opposite of oneself. The first law is already a reversal of the sensible world, because it reveals that which first appears to be real as mere appearance, as both untrue and unreal, and expresses essence as the only true reality with solid being. Only essence can preserve the alteration and the becoming of the sensible world as the inverted image of itself. The second law is also a supersensible world: “[t]his second supersensible world is in this way the inverted world, namely, while one aspect is already present in the first supersensible world, this is the inverted version of this first supersensible world.”² It absorbs the alteration and becoming of the sensible world—originally seen as the inverted world—elevating it to the positive principle of the supersensible world, while inversely regarding the fixed and unchanging law of the understanding (the first law) as the inverted, untrue image of this positive principle, that is, as the superficial law of “appearance.” This second law is the principle of dialectical reason (demonstrated by Kant), but it stops merely at the understanding’s negative understanding. Kant attempts to eliminate contradictions by restricting this capacity of reason, but the second law always accompanies the first, canceling its achievements and revealing its inherently subjective limitations. This leads to a higher point of view, which no longer regards the reversal of this second supersensible world as merely a subjective fantasy, or as an illusion of sensibility, but rather as an affirmative principle of objective existence, which is no longer the principle of finite things but instead that of infinite and affirmative reason:

Therefore, from the representation of inversion, which constitutes the essence of one aspect of the supersensible world, the sensuous representation of the attachment of the differences in diverse elements of stable existence must be detached, and this absolute concept of difference is to be purely exhibited and grasped as inner difference, as the repulsion of the like pole (as the like pole) from itself, and as the sameness of the non-same (as the non-same). It is to make one think through the pure flux, or the opposition within itself, the contradiction.³

In that way, the supersensible world, which is the inverted world, has at the same time enveloped the other world and has it in itself. It is for itself the inverted world, which is to say, it is the inversion of itself, and it is itself and its opposed world within one unity. Only in that way is it the difference as inner difference, or the difference in itself, or is the difference as infinity.⁴

This view goes beyond the standpoint of the understanding's consciousness and rises to the level of true self-consciousness. The understanding's consciousness consists of inverting inner subjective universality (the universal) into objective law, while the self-consciousness of reason consists in reversing this kingdom of objective laws into the infinite kingdom of internal movement, becoming and contradiction. "Consciousness of an other, of an object as such, is indeed itself necessarily self-consciousness, being-reflected into itself, consciousness of its own self, in its otherness."⁵

These are the two inversions of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The first time it is the inversion of the understanding (this inversion already begins when "perception" transcends sensibility through language in the formation of universals). The second time it is the inversion of reason (when it still sees this inversion as illusory or as an illusion, it still fails to realize it). However, these two inversions, as well as those later inversions found in the *Phenomenology* (like that of the master-servant relation, that of the law of the heart into arrogance, the inversion of enlightenment into faith etc.), are only some empirical (and even historical) states of consciousness and acts thereof, not purely conceptual movements. As a reflection function of the concept, the inverted relationship only finds its pure form reflected in the *Science of Logic*.

In the *Logic*, the "Doctrine of Essence," Hegel once again examines this doctrine of the inverted world from the perspective of reflection. He insists, "the law is the reflection of appearance into self-identity,"⁶ and "is therefore the essential appearance."⁷ "In fact, however, law is also the other of appearance as appearance, and its negative reflection as in its other."⁸ The law negates or excludes appearance as that which is different from itself, but those appearances that are excluded themselves have a law, so what is negated or excluded by the law is the (other) law itself. For example, when we calculate the motion of a falling body, we must exclude the air friction as an insignificant accidental appearance so as to obtain the pure formula of free fall reflecting the essence, but air friction also has a law and the entire appearance

is nothing more than the world of law. Law is not part of the world; “it is the essential totality of appearance.”⁹ It is what is pure and persistently existing without alteration for a particular appearance, “but because it is now the total reflection of this world, it also contains the moment of its essenceless manifoldness.”¹⁰ This is the moment of “variability and becoming,” that is, the moment of “absolute negativity” and self-negation. So the law of being-in-itself at the same time becomes the law of being-for-itself. This supersensible world of being in and for itself ceases to be merely the external “ground” behind the appearance, which is used to explain the appearance and simplify appearances, through the negation of itself by itself in movement and transformation; it is now a world that accommodates and integrates the infinitely rich diversity of the phenomenal world:

[T]herefore, the world that exists in and for itself has truly returned into itself, in such a manner that that other world is its opposite. Their connection is, therefore, specifically this, that the world that exists in and for itself is the inversion of the world of appearance.¹¹ [...] It is precisely in this opposition of the two worlds that their difference has disappeared.¹²

The essence (law) is manifest, and the appearance is also essence. The essential content is found in the negation of itself, in its lawful movement of passing over into one another:

[A]s complete reflection of the world of appearance into itself, or because its diversity is difference reflected into itself and absolute, [it] consequently contains negativity as a moment and self-reference as reference to otherness; it thereby becomes self-opposed, self-inverting, essenceless content [...] [I]t is equally sublated ground and immediate concrete existence.¹³

In other words, the law is inverted into direct appearance, and inversely, appearance becomes the “law of appearance.” Appearance represents its own law and enters into relation with other appearances, or the law of appearance; however, this relationship is no longer just the contingent relation of appearances external to one another, but the necessary relation of interdependence and the ratio of a certain law. So the law of each alternately regards itself as essence and the other as appearance, or regards itself as appearance and the other as essence. “For in their mutually indifferent diversity they are thrown back into themselves, so that the subsistence of each equally has its meaning only in its reference to the other or in the negative unity of both.”¹⁴ So these two aspects have become two moments of the same “essential relation” (the relative relation of essence); that is, the positive becomes the negative and the negative becomes the positive. “It is the same opposition as that of positive and negative, but it is such as an inverted world.”¹⁵ Hegel here explicitly reminds readers to refer to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁶ It just

shows that the doctrine of the inverted world here is the expression of the same as that of the *Phenomenology* in the purity of reflection. However, the *Phenomenology* immediately enters “self-consciousness,” while the *Logic* is far more complicated, moving from the “Doctrine of Essence” to the “Doctrine of Concept,” with the necessity of moving through the “Actuality” section (including the three chapters of the absolute, actuality and absolute relation). However, in the “Actuality” section, Hegel finally concludes that “Absolute Necessity” is a “conversion” of sort. That is, “since its connection is that of absolute identity, it is the absolute conversion of its actuality into its possibility and its possibility into its actuality.”¹⁷ In the “Absolute Relation” section, “interaction” is actually a conversion of sorts, that is, the conversion of cause and effect (although the term “conversion” is not used here), where it follows the same thread as the previous thought about laws altering into one another: it can be seen from these passages that the entire three chapters of the “Actuality” section are in fact discussing how the transition from the understanding to reason is made, that is, the problem of the conceptual transition to grasping his own conversion, which is the problem of how to transition from necessity to freedom.

Hegel points out that the inverting function of reflection is not only for positing the external form of the movement of categories and the empty form divorced of content, but also for the immediate presentation of the concept’s self-negativity. Hegel reminds us when talking about “the essential relationship of mutual opposition (ratio)” that the inversion of essence and phenomenon and of internal and external cannot be understood merely as conversion of form, because the conversion of form “still misses this identical substrate that contains them both; their reference is for this reason the immediate conversion of the one into the other, and this negative unity tying them together is the simple point empty of content.”¹⁷ But on the other hand, Hegel believes we cannot merely restrict this to content empty of form, and regards the inverse form as an indifferent external appearance. He argues:

The first of the identities considered, the identity of inner and outer, is the substrate which is indifferent to the difference of these determinations as to a form external to it, or the identity is as content. The second is the unmediated identity of their difference, the immediate conversion of each into its opposite, or it is inner and outer as pure form. But both these identities are only the sides of one totality, or the totality itself is only the conversion of the one identity into the other.¹⁸

Therefore, “the content is the form itself.”¹⁹ The conversion is not simply shifting without principle from one law to another, but is one and the same totality and ground, mediating itself by itself, whereby it reverts back from “reflection in its other” to “self-reflection.” As mentioned, Hegel once proposed that when distinguishing between three different types of reflection, determinateness “has deflected its reflection-into-other into reflection-into

itself.”²⁰ This is our entry into the highest reflection, namely that of “determining reflection”:

The determination of reflection, on the contrary, has taken its otherness back into itself. It is positedness—negation which has however deflected the reference to another into itself, and negation which, equal to itself, is the unity of itself and its other.²¹

This is the conversion. However, before this conversion, reflection must also undergo a conversion, that is, from “posited reflection” to “external reflection,” all the way back to “presupposed reflection,” during which,

the movement of reflection is to be taken as an absolute internal counter-repelling. [...] Transcending the immediate from which reflection begins occurs rather only through this transcending; and the transcending of the immediate is the arriving at the immediate. The movement, as forward movement, turns immediately around into itself.²²

Clearly here, determining reflection is already the inversion of an inversion.²³ This is because external reflection has converted posited reflection into its other, an object (being). Determining reflection then regards this object as posited, which is determined by reflection itself, thereby entering “infinite self-relation.” It is no longer the reflective form of subjective abstraction, but possesses a rich and vital content, which, as form, does nothing other than continually posit content.

Obviously, the word “reflection” already contains the meaning of “inversion.” The image reflected in the mirror is always inverted, so reflectively thinking over (*Nachdenken*) the image in the mirror must also proceed from an inverting perspective. That is, the left side of the image is to be seen as actually the right side, the right side is actually the left and vice versa, which inverts the inversion, or rather, it is the negation of the negation. Just as true negation is always the negation of the negation, true reflection is always the movement from “reflection in its other” back to “self-reflection,” which is the inversion of the inversion. Just as the negation of the negation constitutes the moving force of the concept, for the deduction of the categories and their forward progression, the inversion of the inversion constitutes the positive understanding of this negative movement, whereby it becomes prescriptive or regulative, a graspable formal law or rule for speculatively predicting and deducing. This law is established as a logical principle in Hegel’s *Logic*, the “Doctrine of Concept,” through the doctrine of “judgment.”

Hegel asserts that if judgment is understood in the abstract and subjective sense, it is just the connecting of two words, where each word (subject and predicate) is independent and indifferent to the other, simply because people subjectively add one word to another and use “to be” as the copula to forge this connection. Hegel believes that such judgment is nothing more than a

“proposition.” Real judgment should be the “originative division” (*Urteil*) of the concept itself. That is, judgment is the self-partitioning of the concept.²⁴ Although the subject and predicate do not restore the unity of the concept through this originative division, they still share some identity even in this external, seemingly indifferent parting:

But since the concept constitutes the essential ground of judgment, these determinacies are at least indifferent in the sense that, when one accrues to the subject and the other to the predicate, the converse relation equally holds. The subject, being the singular, appears at first as the existent or as the one that exists for itself with the determinate determinateness of a singular on which judgment is passed [...] The predicate, which is the universal, appears on the contrary as the reflection of this judgment on that object, or rather as the object’s immanent reflection [...] These two are one and the same—the positing of singularity in its immanent reflection and of the universal as determinate.²⁵

This is the “objective meaning” of judgment. In its objective process, under the condition that judgment is not disrupted by subjective arbitration, judgement necessarily shows the tendency to return the predicate to the subject, which the *Logic* calls reflection and the *Phenomenology* calls speculation:

The nature of judgment, or of the proposition per se, which includes the difference between subject and predicate within itself, is destroyed by the speculative judgment, and the identical proposition, which the former comes to be, contains the counter-stroke to those relations.²⁶

Thinking thus loses its fixed objective basis which it had in the subject, when, in the predicate, it was thrown back to the subject, and when, in the predicate, it returns not into itself but into the subject of the content.²⁷

Hegel points out, this is what makes those who are accustomed to thinking in terms of appearance and external reflection (understanding) find it difficult to understand philosophy (speculative philosophy). They always understand philosophical propositions as “reasoning” or explaining, not as “the dialectical movement of the proposition itself,” “but rather this return into itself on the part of the concept.”²⁸ “The exposition which stays true to its insight into the nature of what is speculative must retain the dialectical form and must import nothing into it except what is both comprehended and is the concept.”²⁹ Clearly, Hegel’s theory of “judgment” and the proposition posits the general form of dialectical thinking (speculation). Of course, this theory is based on his understanding of concept and content, and grounds his theory of the “syllogism,” but this just explains the importance of judgment as the formal principle of the dialectic in Hegel’s *Logic*. Judgments, or “originative partitionings,” thus understood constitute “the parts or moments”³⁰ of the dialectical movement in Hegel’s *Logic*.

From this standpoint of reflection or speculation, we indeed see this conversion at almost every step in Hegel's *Logic*. In a sense, the entire *Logic* is a process of converting that makes up the path of Truth in logic. Whenever Hegel says, "XX is the truth of XX," he is expressing a relationship of inversion, the meaning of which is not only that the second concept is the opposite of the first concept, but also that the concept can only find its truth in the concept opposite to it. That is, only by reversing its own image can one obtain its own true image. For example, in the Doctrine of Existence, he states, "[w]hen we talk about the concept of being, the latter can consist only in becoming, since as being it is the empty nothing and as such the empty being."³¹ Similarly, "essence" is the truth of existence, and "the concept" is the truth of both "existence" and "essence"; "[e]ssence came to be out of being, and the concept out of essence, therefore also from being. But this becoming has the meaning of a self-repulsion, so that what becomes is rather the unconditional and the originate."³² In addition, the process making up each part of the *Logic* also corresponds to that of the others in the form of reversing and repeating them. For instance, "the same determinations surface in the development of the essence as in the development of being, but in reflected form."³³ Similarly, "the concept has proven itself to be the truth of being and essence, both of which have gone back into it as into its ground."³⁴ This inverting function of reflection involves the "circle" as thought, which we have touched upon when discussing the negative. The essence of the circle is, of course, the negation of the negation, but as a mode of thinking, it is rather inversion or the inversion of the inversion, even though in "Concrete Existence," the self-negativity of the category is still latent and needs to be revealed by external reflection; in the doctrine of essence, the category's negation of itself is presented as self-reflection of some kind, but has not yet closed the circle by way of reflection in its other. Only in "the concept" do the form of the circle and the content of the circle (negation) secure this union. However, from the perspective of form itself, the three major parts of the *Logic* clearly follow the circular (or spiral) progression from the beginning, that is, the procedure of inversion and reversion back to itself:

That progression is a retreat to the ground, to the origin and the truth on which that with which the beginning was made [...] It also follows that what constitutes the beginning, because it is something still undeveloped and empty of content, is not yet truly known at that beginning, and that only science, and science fully developed, is the completed cognition of it, replete with content and finally truly grounded.³⁵

Although this circular or inverting progression is just the law or pattern expressed by the intrinsic principle of self-negation, the negation of itself by itself, without this formal determination, the negation of and by itself cannot develop; it cannot reflect itself as a logical process and become graspable to reason.

In addition to this meaning found in the *Logic*, we can also find another more substantive meaning of the inverting function of reflection in Hegel, which is the epistemological meaning. Hegel's inversion is not only the inversion of the subject and predicate in judgment, but also the inversion of the subject and object in knowing. Of course, these two meanings are also closely linked. It is precisely Hegel's discovery of the dialectical relationship of inversion between the subject and the predicate in judgment that enables him to further reveal this dialectical relationship between subject and object; or inversely, it is because he regards the relationship between subject and object as dialectical from the beginning that he exploits the possibility of viewing the subject and predicate in the logical statement as the inverse of one another. Both of these inversions come from the same reflection. From the epistemological point of view, reflection also undergoes two conversions. The first is in the inversion of subjective thoughts and ideas into objective substances and essences through reflection on perceptual things.

Through the process of thinking something over, its content is altered from the way it is in sensation, intuition, or representation initially. Thus, it is only by means of [*vermittels*] an alteration that the true nature of the object emerges in consciousness.³⁶

Therefore, the reflective product and thought must be regarded

as the opposite of something merely subjective and see in it what is essential, true, and objective in things [...] Now at first blush this seems to be quite misguided and contrary to the end at stake in knowing. Nonetheless, it can be said that it has been the conviction of all times that only by reworking the immediate, a reworking produced by thinking things over, is something substantive attained.³⁷

At this point, Hegel greatly appreciates Kant's approach:

The linguistic usage referred to just now thus seems to have been stood on its head, and Kant has for this reason been accused of linguistic confusion. But this is a great injustice. Looked at more closely, things are as follows,

because in reality what the senses perceive is subjective and erratic, "and thoughts are by contrast what is truly independent and primary."³⁸ Of course, he also calls out Kant's "objectivity" as being still ultimately subjective in the end, not the thing itself ("the ego itself"), which is the source of his dissatisfaction.

Hegel thus distinguishes three meanings in the term "objectivity":

In the first place, it has the meaning of what is on hand externally, as distinct from what is subjective, i.e. what is meant or dreamed up. Second, it

has the meaning established by Kant, i.e. the universal and the necessary, in contrast to what, as inherent to sensation, is contingent, particular, and subjective. And third, it has the meaning last mentioned above, of what is thought to be in itself, what is there, in contrast to what is merely thought by us and therefore still different from the matter itself or in itself.³⁹

Here, the first meaning is the point of view of everyday consciousness; the second meaning is Kant's inverse viewpoint; and the third meaning is Hegel's inversion of the inversion. The formation of the third point of view relies on reflection to reverse Kant's inversion of the subjective and the objective, namely: subjective thought not only constitutes the objective object inside of subjective cognition, but also constitutes the objective object outside of subjective cognition, and therefore this kind of objectivity is not just universality and necessity, but also the process of making objective activity, freedom or the subject (the subjective) itself.

Since in thinking things over their true nature emerges and since this thinking is just as much my activity, that true nature is equally the product of my spirit insofar as the latter is a thinking subject. It is mine in accordance with my simple universality, i.e. as an I that is entirely with itself—it is the product of my freedom.⁴⁰

Kant reflects on the objectivity of subjective thinking, but this objectivity is still an external objectivity in opposition with the objectivity of the thing-in-itself, or rather it is still caught up in the opposition of the subjective and the objective. Hegel regards the objectivity of the thing-in-itself as the product of the universality of the subjective "I," as the thought and concept of a free nature. Therefore, Kant's subjective objectivity (the categories and the synthesis of apperception) is further reversed into objective subjectivity (the substance of the logical Idea). This reaches the (inverted) ontology of objective idealism unique to Hegel:

The logical thoughts are not some accessory over against all this content. Rather, all this other content is merely an accessory compared to the logical forms [...] We do not pick them up in some external fashion and then define them or demonstrate their value and their validity by comparing them to the way in which they happen to surface in our consciousness [...] And yet, we do not have to use such a standard but instead let these determinations, alive in themselves, count for themselves.⁴¹

In this way, the inverting function of reflection has threefold meaning in the logic, epistemology and ontology of Hegel's dialectics. This function also constitutes the common form of expression that these three aspects share. These three aspects and their relationship of unity with Hegel's dialectics are the subject of the next chapter. What we want to continue to examine here is

the second function of Hegel's "reflection," that is, the function of necessity in Hegel's particular sense.

Reflection and necessity

We have shown that "reflection" in Hegel composes the philosophical model of Hegel's logical movement by way of inverting or "reverting back." We furthermore have mentioned that Hegel regards this model as "law." But then the following problem emerges: for this model to become "law," it must have some necessity of its own; otherwise, even if we prove that this model is inseparable from the content, even if we prove that it is not just a subjective mode of thinking but is the very model of the moving development of objective things, we still cannot call it "law" because it may still be contingent. This is like the issue with the proposition "the sun rises in the East every day," which is no law (even though we have already seen and confirmed this hundreds of millions of times). It must be the same as the omnipresent law of gravity, which is only law because it is so in all cases. Why must thought follow this model of self-negation in order to correctly express the process of objective movement? Isn't this model simply a practical rhetorical principle (as Aristotle understood "dialectics")? If it is in its character to be necessary, then what kind of necessity is this?

To answer this question, let us first look at the traditional Western understanding of the concept of "necessity" and Hegel's innovative understanding of it.

In ancient Greece, necessity mainly meant "destiny." The fatal outlook is one of the most important themes expressed in ancient Greek mythology as well as in the Homeric epics and tragedies. Fate in this sense did not refer to the historical mission undertaken by a person, nor did it refer to the "national destiny" of the state or a dynasty, but rather to the unconscious power that controls the fortune and demise of the person, something that people (even God) cannot escape and cannot grasp or understand, but although it is beyond the knowledge and grasp of persons, it always shows that it is not purely contingent by way of coincidences, implicit signs, divine retribution and comedic repetition and so on. It shows that it possesses its own inherent measure that is unknown to man. Therefore, in addition to being connected to the notions of justice and revenge, fate is always accompanied by the notions of measure, law and time. A great example of this in Greek mythology is the goddess Nemesis,⁴² who is not only the goddess of destiny but also the goddess of punishment and revenge, and the goddess of justice, Dike, is also the goddess of temporal order and revenge. She is sister to Elites (Nemesis) and Moirai (the Fates). The Greek conception of destiny was also an important thought considered by the earliest philosophers in ancient Greece. Anaximander is said to have proposed: "The things from which everything is produced are destroyed and returned to it again, which is dictated by fate, because everything is unjust in the order of time, it is punished and complements each

other.”⁴³ The meaning of all levels of fate is expressed here: destiny is that which is eternally unchanging behind all generation and decay, or that which causes the birth and destruction of all things. Destiny is the irreversible course of time, or a linear process; destiny is a process of reaching equilibrium and rightness (fairness, justice) by way of moving from the wrong (injustice) to the mending correction (revenge, punishment). It could be imagined as a circle or a constant measure. But what is destiny itself? Anaximander does not explain, perhaps because he could not find a philosophical concept to express it.

It was not until Heraclitus presented the doctrine of *logos* that the Greek conception of fate found its own philosophical expression and ceased to rely solely on the language of poetry. This is necessity, that is, measure, order, cycle or, in a word, *logos*. According to Asius:

Heraclitus asserts that everything follows fate, and fate is necessity. —He declared that the essence of fate is the “Logos” which runs through the universe. “Logos” is an etheric object, the seed of creating the world, and the scale of the cycle.⁴⁴

Simplicius also insists that Heraclitus “recognized that the transformation of the world has a certain order and a certain period, adapting to the inevitable necessity.”⁴⁵ This scale, period or necessity is inevitable for man, as Heraclitus himself said: “How can one escape the things that never stop?”⁴⁶ The endless, eternal cycle, the unbreakable circle with its own scale and proportions, it is a force so great that the human will cannot but submit to it. But thanks to the ground that Heraclitus makes for it with the concept of *logos*, destiny, fate or necessity no longer hangs over the head of human beings as an ungraspable and unknowable mystery, since *logos* is nothing more than a language that is understandable to all, which is to say it is reason, and reason is possessed by all. The inverting function of *logos* prompts people to reflect on fate itself, thus providing the premise for a certain reconciliation between the necessity of fate and human freedom. Heraclitus’s thought of fate or necessity merged with the later Stoic philosophy of reason, rationalism and logical thought, at which point Stoicism found the conditions to present a new concept of freedom: submit to your fate, consciously control and restrain yourself, do not act on those inner impulses of yours that violate necessity, “leave the matter as it is” so as to keep your inner peace free of disturbances. This is freedom; it is not freedom to act in violation of necessary laws and indulge your personal desires. This Stoic conception of freedom would go on to become the forerunner of the conception of necessity in Christianity and modern rationalism; its reflection is still visible in the Kantian conception of “self-regulation” along with its profound influence upon the Hegelian conception of inner necessity, namely freedom. Hegel points out that with respect to necessity, the transcendence of modern people over the ancients “must be seen as the decisive one in the comparison with the ancient and our modern, Christian attitude.”⁴⁹ He argues, the disposition of the ancients

is “higher and worthier” than that of moderners with their conception of subjective immediate freedom in finite individuals.⁴⁷ However, modern people rise above the ancients in unifying the subjective and objective, in unifying freedom and necessity, in breaking through the restriction of the subjective and in overcoming the abstractness of freedom, making possible the infinite subject and the necessity of freedom. The “ancients” here mainly refer to the general public in ancient Greek times, the national consciousness of freedom and of destiny as reflected in the Homeric epics, myths and tragedies. The Stoic standpoint on destiny should count in principle as bearing the seeds of modern Christian thought.

Ever since Heraclitus of ancient Greece, the previous conception of necessity has arguably constituted the most important theoretical pillar of Western rationalism as a whole, as well as of the Western conception of the universality of logic and of the core tradition of *logos*. Our analysis of this conception includes the following three elements:

1. Necessity is always understood as the inner process of the same thing. Only when “this is that” (for example, plants are first seeds) does the relationship between this and that count as necessary. This aspect is the immediacy of necessity.
2. For this reason, necessity must a relationship of identity between two things. Necessity does not appear “all at once” (otherwise it would be purely contingent), but rather proves itself and realizes itself through a process. To argue that something is “necessary” would require supplying the basis and proof of it, that is, showing another thing, that this other thing is not this thing but only the “measure” of this thing.
3. Because one thing is only necessary on condition of being grounded by another thing, necessity has a certain ordinal sequence, an irreversible temporal order, which includes a causal relation. What is necessary is ineluctable, unavoidable and temporally irreversible. Anything whose order is reversible is unnecessary but is instead free (thus the concept of “freedom” emerges when Hegel advances to “community” from “causality”). Therefore, Hegel also calls necessity “objective necessity” in order to oppose it to “subjective arbitrariness” or freedom.

However, this traditional conception of necessity always faces one inevitable limitation, which is in the irreconcilable contradiction with the free will and free activity of human beings. Stoicism’s “disinterest of mind” actually turns freedom into an empty form devoid of all content, which falls under “abstract freedom” along with freedom according to the Epicurean sensibility. Christianity threads the entanglement of freedom with God’s necessity into the entanglement of human freedom with necessity, which further complicates the problem and brings it to no result. Kant’s “autonomy” or “self-regulation” affirms the identity between free will’s activity and necessary law in the purely abstract transcendent realm, but in real life it is still a

subjective desire that plays no role whatsoever. In fact, it is not even a subjective desire, it is just a logical deduction of abstract reason, which is to say, according to the law of non-contradiction of thought in general, my action “should” become a self-identical law (absolute command), but this “should” is itself the absolute opposite of the law of nature; it is abstract. All of the different conceptions above dissolve freedom in logical necessity to reconcile the opposition between freedom and necessity, but also sharpen the opposition with real necessity. Hegel was indeed the first to break through this (theoretical) impasse. While necessity (rationality) for the Western tradition is inverting and reflecting on the ancient conception of destiny, Hegel’s concept of necessity is the re-inverting and rethinking of this tradition. He transcends absolute obedience on behalf of the individual with respect to objective necessity (whether real or logical) and restores the great importance that the ancients found in personal subjectivity. He insists that we should absolutely obey not the necessity of external reality, not the necessity of the inner mind’s abstract logic (law of non-contradiction), but the necessity of the inner impulse, the necessity of self-negation. We are full of contradictions, pain and anxiety, and we therefore have the active necessity of outwardly actualizing and practicing this inner impulse of self-negation in the external world. Of course, as the greatest rationalist philosopher of the modern age, Hegel strives to prove that the necessity of his system and ideas is surely undeniable and in the strictest sense “rational.” However, in his view, this kind of necessity is, truthfully speaking, freedom. Not only in Stoicism but also in the modern age, in Spinoza, Leibniz and so on, the concept of necessity is higher than that of freedom, and the essence of freedom is necessity. In Kant, although the concept of freedom is higher than that of necessity, freedom is still opposed to necessity, but in Hegel, the concept of freedom is not only higher than that of necessity, but freedom furthermore is also what posits necessity, or in other words, all that is truly necessary is essentially nothing but freedom itself.

Although Hegel’s concept of necessity in the particular sense is applied everywhere in the *Logic*, which turns the *Logic* into a deductive system with strict necessity, necessity is only fully elucidated when it comes to one part of the *Logic*, namely the “Doctrine of Essence,” whose elucidation of necessity is in fact the critical examination of the traditional Western concept of it, while adopting the form of this concept demonstrating itself by the power of the contradictions within itself. In the *Logic*, this critical elucidation is situated in the shadow cast by Hegelian reflection, and consequently, it maps out the history of the formation of Hegel’s own concept of necessity.

In the first part of the “Doctrine of Essence,” “Essence as Reflection Within,” Hegel focuses on the issues of identity, difference (including contradiction) and ground, which actually provides reflection’s perspective for the three moments of the traditional Western concept of necessity that we just analyzed, that is, immediacy, mediation and irreversibility. The traditional concept of necessity is first of all based on the immediate self-identity of things, namely, the law of identity. A thing or process that consistently stays

the same from beginning to end is regarded as necessary. For instance, when a seed grows into a plant, it still belongs to its “species” and does not become something else. Secondly, traditional necessity is also based on the differential principle of things, in which sense, necessity is found in one thing grounding another thing that differs from it, but owing to the fact that the other thing has to have its own ground as well, such necessity becomes an endless mediating chain of continual regress. Leibniz’s “law of sufficient reason” is the concentrated expression of such necessity. Finally, traditional necessity is also understood as having an ultimate, absolutely necessary ground or substance or “thing-in-itself,” which is untouched by the differentness and contingencies of finite things. Even if finite things fall into contradiction, the self-identity of this substance remains unaffected by it. Therefore, the contradiction is illusory or subjective; it comes from the necessary ground, and vanishes through reflection into the necessary ground, but it is not by itself necessary; it is merely contingent, a subjective illusion, so its relationship with the ground is irreversible. Spinoza’s substance, Leibniz’s “predetermined harmony” and Kant’s thing-in-itself and unity of apperception are all based on this “pre-supposed” understanding of necessity. These three ideas of necessity are all non-speculative, and such reflection that isolates identity, difference and ground is bound to fall into pure contingency: The necessity of immediate self-identity is itself immediate contingency; mediating proof is necessary because the initial premise of the proof is always unproven and contingent; therefore, the whole process is contingent as well. Similarly, the irreversible absolute ground is not “reflective” precisely for being irreversible and unknowable, and thus it is a supposition that is subjective, arbitrary and groundless or contingent.

Contrary to the traditional views mentioned above, Hegel insists that identity is the identity of that which possesses difference. Identity itself as that which is dissimilar from difference is already a difference, so true identity is not immediate, preexisting self-equality “but a self-equality which, in producing itself as unity” becomes equal with itself.⁴⁸ Difference is also difference with identity: “Two things are not perfectly alike. So they are at the same time alike and unlike.”⁴⁹ Difference necessarily develops into opposition and contradiction thanks to the identity of differences, while only contradiction is the true ground: “Its positive side where it becomes absolute activity and absolute ground.”⁵⁰ Hegel draws out his own viewpoint on necessity from this:

the true inference from the finite and accidental to an absolutely necessary being does not consist in inferring the latter from that finite and accidental as a being which is and remains the ground of the inference, but from it as a being which is only “falling” [as accidentality, from the Latin *cadere*, immediately conveys], a being inherently self-contradictory; or rather, the inference consists in demonstrating that accidental being makes in itself its return to its ground and is there sublated—in addition, that in this return to the ground it posits the latter in such a manner that it makes itself rather into a positedness.⁵¹

The absolute ground is actively posited by the accidental, finite and self-contradictory. Something finite and accidental is not a passive vassal with no activity or initiative; it is the activity of necessary being or of the absolute ground itself. Not only is the entire process not irreversible, but it is straightforwardly reversing: the accidental or contingent positing its own necessity in itself is simply it reverting back to the ground within itself.

Thus, Hegel concretely analyzes how the finite and accidental (appearance) posits (or reverts back to) its own necessary ground through its own negation of itself and its own contradictory movement in the second part, "Appearance." Then, in the third part, "Actuality," Hegel officially unfolds the analysis of the absolute ground and the concept of necessity. The entire "Doctrine of Essence" elucidates this concept of necessity, but the most immediate treatment given to it is in "Actuality," especially in the second section of it (also titled "Actuality"), from which we see that his necessity is actual necessity, but his actuality is also necessary (rational and fully logical) actuality. Above we have examined Hegel's critique of the three traditional ideas of necessity, which may help us understand the three concepts of necessity proposed by Hegel here: (1) Accidental (formal) necessity; (2) Relative or actual necessity; (3) Absolute necessity. Here Hegel interweaves another pair of categories, namely, possibility and reality, which have also gone through three stages, that is, formal, actual and absolute, but the main clue is the deduction of the concept of necessity. Hegel insists that "formal necessity" is simply the necessity of accepting "immediate, non-reflective actuality." Whatever is immediately present possesses its own self-identity: $A = A$. However, this is not enough to turn it into true necessity. From the viewpoint of reflection, it much rather demonstrates that this thing is simply "possible" in precisely the same way that everything that does not contradict itself is possible, but for it to become immediate actuality hinges solely upon the accidental. We often say something is "necessary" after it has already taken place in the same way that we chalk everything up to "fate" (resign to fate) when we encounter misfortune and forget to go back to (reflect on) the ground of it; in other words, we simply make abstract necessity (fate) serve as the "ground" of this accidental misfortunate event. This necessity is nothing more than accidentality: "The contingent thus has no ground because it is contingent; and for that same reason it has a ground, because it is contingent."⁵² This is the quiescent attitude with which the ancients resigned to destiny:

The disposition of the Ancients, on the contrary, was to say: It is so, *because* it is, and it ought to be just *the way* it is. So there is no antithesis here, and hence no unfreedom, no pain, and no suffering.⁵³

Second, Hegel insists that the relatively and actually necessary has to be higher than the previous "formally" necessary, because it considers the necessity, not of an isolated actual thing but of the real relationship between one thing, another thing and the surrounding environment. Such actual things

have a real (but not formal) possibility: only one possibility is possible, which is to say, such a possibility is necessary:

But this necessity is at the same time relative. —For it has a presupposition from which it begins; it takes its start from the contingent [...].⁵⁷ But this necessity thus begins from that unity of the possible and the actual which is not yet reflected into itself—this presupposing and the movement which turns back unto itself are still separate—or necessity has not yet determined itself out of itself into contingency [...] [Thus] a necessary reality is for this reason any limited actuality which, because of its limitation, is in some other respect also only something contingent.⁵⁴

Such necessity merely pushes the accidental out of the way, but it is itself grounded by the accidental, and consequently, it is still contingent, which is equivalent to the “modern Christian attitude” toward necessity that is expecting to get some kind of “consolation” and compensation from (God’s) necessity: “This consists generally in the fact that, while we give up our purposes, our interests, we do so with the prospect of acquiring a substitute for them.”⁵⁵ The reason why this hope is not unfounded is thanks to it supposing God’s goodwill and justice, or in Leibniz’s words, God chooses the best of all possible worlds. Modern natural science and mechanistic natural philosophy also essentially hold such a viewpoint of finite necessity like that of the “prime mover.” Ultimately, Hegel also disagrees with such blind “absolute necessity.” Even though such kinds of necessity “have here the unity of necessity and contingency,”⁵⁶ they fail to grasp and realize for-itself this unity. Here, the moment of actuality and the moment of possibility are still rigidly opposing one another. Consequently, each becomes an empty determination and inverts in-itself into its opposite: actuality inverts into possibility; possibility inverts into actuality; however, they do not even become conscious of this inversion even in the middle of it. Instead, each just rigidly clings to itself as having the distinction of reflection. “They are therefore free actualities, neither of which reflectively shines in the other, nor will either allow in it a trace of its reference to the other; grounded in itself, each is inherently necessary.”⁵⁷ Kant’s thing-in-itself and a priori unity of apperception manifest as such: the actuality of the thing-in-itself is already seen as possible (and even as an “ought”), and the capacity (possibility) of apperception is also already seen as positing itself as actuality (humanity legislating for nature), but the two still have nothing to do with one another: “[n]ecessity as essence is concealed in this being; the reciprocal contact of these actualities appears, therefore, as an empty externality; the actuality of the one in the other is the possibility which is only possibility, contingency.”⁵⁸ They have no conscious conversion, no self-conscious reversal, “there is no reflective shining in these actualities, no reflex—because they are grounded purely in themselves, are shaped for themselves, manifest themselves only to themselves.”⁵⁹

Hegel also insists that this property of deficiency expressed from the standpoint of “being” is just another positivity from the standpoint of “essence.” Hegel does not negate “absolute necessity” across the board; he immediately points out:

But their essence will break forth in them and will reveal what it is and what they are. The simplicity of their being, their resting just on themselves, is absolute negativity; it is the freedom of their reflectionless immediacy.⁶⁰

That is to say, the absolute negativity that the transcendental unity of apperception realizes reveals a “freedom.” Of course, this sort of freedom that immediately bursts forth (at this point, merely accidentally) still faces the similarly free opposition of itself with otherness, which is not to be missed in these actualities, for it makes “what determinateness is in its truth,” that freedom, which “is negative self-reference,” run “blind” into “collapse” and become “nothing” (just as Kant’s transcendental ego dispelling the being in-itself of actual empirical data limits itself to false appearances, which are “nothing,” entirely unrelated to essence). “But, conversely, being is equally essence, and becoming is reflection or a shining. Thus the externality is its inwardness; their connection is one of absolute identity.”⁶¹ In this way, a true inversion is brought about, namely: “Contingency is absolute necessity; it is itself the presupposing of that first absolute actuality,” and “the absolutely blind transition of necessity is rather the absolute’s own exposition, its movement in itself which, in its externalization, reveals itself instead.”⁶² The freedom of actuality is itself identical with that freedom of making actuality collapse.

Hegel argues that in order to truly advance from external absolute necessity into such internal absolute necessity, it is still necessary to examine the depths of how the absolute reveals the absolute relation (ratio) to itself, which is the relationship of substances, that of cause and effect and reciprocal interaction. What the relationship of substances reflects is the necessity of immediate identity, what causality exemplifies is the necessity of mediating proof, but what interaction exhibits is absolute necessity. Because cause and effect are reversed in the interaction,

causality has thereby returned to its absolute concept and has at the same time attained the concept itself. At first, it is real necessity, absolute self-identity in which the difference between it and the determinations referring to each other within it are substances, free actualities, over against one another. Necessity is in this way inner identity; causality is the manifestation of it in which its reflective shine of substantial otherness has been sublated, and necessity is elevated to freedom.⁶³

Absolute necessity differentiates itself in the interaction and contains both absolute contingency and its absolute contradiction within itself. In other

words, absolute substance inverts its own accidental difference into its own essence or movement of self-identity by way of interacting, thereby manifesting absolute necessity as freedom,

necessity does not come to be freedom by vanishing but in that its still only inner identity is manifested, and this manifestation is the identical movement immanent to the different sides, the immanent reflection of shine as shine. —Conversely, contingency thereby comes to be freedom at the same time, for the sides of necessity, which have the shape of independent, free actualities that do not reflectively shine into each other, are now posited as an identity.⁶⁴

This internal contradiction of absolute substance is reflected in: first differentiating itself into an interrelation or as the relation between active substance and passive substance, where it considers passive substance to be posited beforehand by active substance (as Kant's thing in-itself is prethought by the understanding), while active substance is itself passive, "which has as such posited itself as an other and refers to it." But the other here that it posits is nothing but the embodiment of its own "power," and passive substance acts as the reflective shine of active substance, thus presenting itself as activity as well: "the passive substance thus comes to be cause, power, and activity."⁶⁵ The active substance becomes the "action" that transfers the activity to the other (passive substance), which is still identical with itself in its other. The unity of the active substance and the passive substance is the subject, that is, the concept: "The transition of the relation of substantiality occurs through its own immanent necessity and is nothing more than the manifestation of itself, that the concept is its truth, and that freedom is the truth of necessity."⁶⁶ Necessity is only necessary in the true sense if it cancels out the irreversibility in its self-reference and unifies immediacy and mediation as activity, which is freedom. This freedom reverts back to the first kind of necessity, which is the absolute accidentality of self-identity and self-consistency, after going through the three stages of necessity, but it also has the characteristics of the first and third kinds of necessity, that is, it is the ground of all external things, but relies on external things to reflect itself. In this interactive relationship, another sort of irreversibility is found in it, but it is a reversed irreversibility. Freedom is not produced by necessity, but necessity is produced by freedom, so it is irreversible for freedom (free will), for external necessity. On the other hand, it is perfectly reversible. The first kind of necessity is immediacy. The second and third kinds of necessity all contain mediation, and freedom is the unity of immediate necessity and mediated necessity. Hegel argues: "The entire second part of the *Logic*, i.e. the doctrine of essence, deals with the essential, self-positing unity of immediacy and mediation."⁶⁷ We can also understand this as an investigation of the free nature latent in necessity, or reflective thinking over.

Now we are prepared to make a general summary of Hegel's "necessity." What is Hegelian necessity? Simply put, Hegel's necessity is rationality and logicity, which is consistent with traditional Western understanding. However, in Hegel's view, this rationality is not external formal reasoning nor the immediate equality of the thing itself, but the thing showing the concept in its essence.

Logical necessity in general consists in the nature of what it is to be its concept in its being. This alone is the rational, the rhythm of the organic whole, and it is just as much the knowing of the content as that content itself is the concept and the essence—that is, it is this alone which is the speculative.⁶⁸

Necessity consists in "the existence of the thing is its concept," which is revealed through reflection on the essence of the thing. When reflection rises from external reflection to speculation, from the opposition of reflection in its other and self-reflection to the identity of both, it reflects on the inner necessity of things, namely freedom. "[S]ubjective reason demands further satisfaction in terms of form. This form is the necessity in general," but in empirical science in general, it is either an empty universality, or some accidental particularity:

in neither respect is justice being done to the form of necessity. The process of thinking over that is directed towards satisfying this need is genuinely philosophical thinking, speculative thinking. This process of thinking things over is both the same as and different from the former process of thinking them over and, as such, it possesses in addition to the shared forms of thinking its own peculiar forms, of which the concept is the general form.⁶⁹

External reflection does not reach the concept but opposes freedom to necessity,

A freedom which did not have any necessity within itself and a mere necessity devoid of freedom—these are abstract and accordingly untrue determinations. Freedom is essentially concrete, determined in itself in an eternal manner, and thus equally necessary. When speaking of necessity one tends at first to understand by it only determinacy from outside, [...] this, however, represents a merely external necessity, not the genuinely inner necessity, for the latter is freedom.⁷⁰

This freedom is not pure arbitrariness but concept, rationality and *logos*. Similarly, the concept is not an abstract concept of the understanding but is instead active, the free concept that moves itself, the concrete concept with necessity and the highest rational freedom, that is, self-transcendence,

transcendence qua transcendence. The necessity of the concept is precisely this self-transcending active dialectic:

The dialectic is, by contrast, this immanent process of going beyond [such determinacy] wherein the one-sided and limited character of the determinations of the understanding presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation, [...] Thus, the dialectical moment constitutes the moving soul of the scientific progression and is the principle through which alone an immanent connection and necessity enters into the content of science, just as in general the true, as opposed to an external, elevation above the finite resides in this principle.⁷¹

Of course, the concept is itself determinateness and certainty; it is the category.

For it is claimed in the process that this application is necessary and that reason possesses no other determinations for knowing than the categories. Knowing is indeed determining and determinate thinking. If reason is merely empty, indeterminate thinking, it thinks nothing.⁷²

This is where the concept differs from arbitrariness and intuition devoid of determination. But the true spirit of freedom also emerges in this necessary determinateness. In German, the word “concept” (*Begriff*) originally means “grasp” (*begreifen*) (for which there is no corresponding word in Chinese). Therefore, in Hegel’s view, all things that are defined, qualified and regulated are actively made by the subject, so the subject can also exceed its own limiting of itself by itself through the negation of itself. In this way, the concept gives actuality to essence, “the essence whose shining thereby has actuality and whose actuality is at the same time the process of freely shining in itself.”⁷³ It reverts back to the simple and immediate necessity of the stage of existence, but this return is not simply a return to the origin; it is no longer the simplicity of immediate facts but the simplicity or immediacy of free action. It is not easy for ordinary people to understand this layer of differences and their connections in it, which is why

the concept of necessity is very difficult and, indeed, it is so because it is the concept itself whose moments still are as actualities that, nonetheless, have to be grasped at the same time merely as forms, as in themselves broken and transitional.⁷⁴

This creates a “hard” necessity. That is, actuality is subject to necessary destiny without exception:

By contrast, thinking the necessity is rather the dissolving of that hardness; for it is the process of its coming-together with itself in an

other,—the liberation which is not the flight of abstraction but instead the liberation of having itself not as other but of having its own being and positing in something else actual with which what is actual is bound together by the power of necessity. [...] but the concept itself is for itself the power of necessity and the actual freedom.⁷⁵

Having to loosen up this “hard” necessity in actual existence was an unprecedented initiative for Hegel’s time, so Hegel deeply felt that the transition from necessity to freedom or from the actual to the concept is “the hardest transition.”⁷⁶ The hardship here is, of course not only that Hegel had to deal with all of the accusations against traditional ideas (in all fields from philosophy and natural science to religion etc.), but it was also extremely difficult and meticulous work in itself; it was the most laborious work for Hegel. To this day, this transition from necessity to freedom is still the key to our understanding of dialectics, which contains many of the most brilliant sparks of thought; but this is also the most imperfect part of Hegel’s logic, and it is also the part that he himself hoped to find an opportunity to adjust and further clarify (such as a large adjustment in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*).

From this we can see that the “logical necessity” of Hegel is not the necessity of rigid formal logic but the active necessity of thinking and of the concept itself.⁷⁷ This kind of necessity does not provide excuses for thinking and acting like lazy people. It seems that people only need to sit down and observe the objectively necessary process. It seems that objective processes externally provide people with tips and mechanisms that appear to be “operable.” It would seem as if the logic of thought has just been (since Aristotle) a “tool” discovered by humankind to grasp ready-made things (today’s analytic philosophy, scientific philosophy or systems philosophy attempts to find more practical tools). Dialectical necessity, on the contrary, happens to take into account the subjective activity of the person, the self-transcendence of the person’s thinking, the capacity to predict (speculate) and be creative, to treat it as a more essential thing. What it must stipulate is the necessary aspect of freedom, and it must grasp the necessary self-negating essence or freedom’s essence. “The realization that the dialectic makes up the very nature of thinking and that as understanding it is bound to land in the negative of itself, i.e. in contradiction, constitutes a cardinal aspect of logic.”⁷⁸ However, this dialectical necessity will not simply become some formal dogma and instrument by acquiring clarity and determination in a book of “logic” that we can consult and apply when encountering practical problems. Hegel’s *Logic* is no such practical tool (this is exactly what many people expect and demand of it, which is the reason why many people discount it out of disappointment). It would be better to say that it is a kind of cultivation or raising (*Bildung*) of the human mind and spirit.⁷⁹ It tells people how to think freely, but this freedom (because it is free) is still in everyone’s own subjectivity. It is just that when this kind of freedom still fails to achieve its own form of necessity, people do

not realize it and do not know what to do with it. It leads people to reflect on their freedom—this is the (practical) purpose of Hegel's doctrine of necessity (in the highest sense).

Therefore, Hegel's "rationality" (*Vernünftigkeit*) is the necessity of freedom, which is rationality grounded in the subject and personality. The subject must be free or striving for freedom (previously, freedom and the pursuit of freedom were the same thing).

Definitions whose content has not merely been taken up as something found, but one that is known to be grounded in free thinking and thus at the same time known to be grounded in itself [...] This particular thought is grounded in universal thinking and therefore necessary.⁸⁰

Here is the necessity of Hegel's *Logic*. This irresistibility of necessity is not imposed on people by external force, but because people realize their freedom and realize that they are not satisfied with just something necessary, they experience it most truly and immediately. This kind of experience penetrates the hard shell of understanding's categories into the inner restlessness, torment and self-negativity contained inherently within them. Through the effect of some sort of humanizing "transfer of affect," the self-negative nature of objective things is "reversed" into the free impulse of human thinking itself.

With the absolute right of the freedom proper to it, this thinking stubbornly insists on reconciling itself with the sound content, but only insofar as this content has been able to give itself the form [*Gestalt*] most worthy of it: that of the concept and of necessity, which binds everything, content as well as thought, and precisely therein makes it free.⁸¹

Clearly, the transition of categories and the development of ideas show "necessity" not so much thanks to the magic of the external forms of the dialectic (three-stage, circle, negation etc.), nor by virtue of being "verified" or "falsified" by computers and experimental statistics, but owing to our deepest reflection on our thinking, to our own spirit, to our own life experiences, beliefs and entire inner world, we truly experience and acknowledge in our hearts: this is truth, and it is a living truth.⁸²

Reflection and synthesis

We can see from the above analysis of necessity that the third logical function of reflection is "synthesis." Hegel's necessity is the necessity of freedom, but the converse can also be said that Hegel's freedom is necessary freedom, that is, self-regulation, not blind animal impulse.

Thus spirit relates purely to itself and is therefore free, for freedom is precisely this: to be at home with oneself in one's other, to be dependent

upon oneself, to be the determining factor for oneself [...] Freedom exists only where there is no other for me that I am not myself.⁸³

Here, freedom is not in itself pure immediacy (like arbitrariness), but is instead a process of mediation; it realizes itself by seizing, by appropriating and grasping (*begreifen*) its other, by taking its other as one's own and shedding it of its "otherness." Freedom is a process.

Freedom is first merely the abstract freedom that is only saved through renunciation of what one immediately is and has. —Furthermore, however, as we have seen up to this point, the process of necessity is of the sort that through it the rigid externality initially on hand is overcome and its inner dimension revealed. By this means, it then becomes apparent that the two sides bound to one another are in fact not alien to one another but instead only moments of one whole, each of which, in its relation to the other, is with itself and comes together with itself. This is the transfiguration of necessity into freedom, and this freedom is not merely the freedom of abstract negation but instead a concrete and positive freedom.⁸⁴

Freedom contains necessity within itself. Because of necessity, freedom is concrete and positive; we can realistically actualize it. When an actuality is combined with another actuality through the power of necessity and is treated as its own positing, this actuality frees itself (*befreien*), or this actuality itself proves to be the freedom of actuality. Hegel believes that there is only personality, subject, "self" and spirit between heaven and earth. In short, only "the concept itself" is such an actuality.⁸⁵

Therefore, in Hegel, the concept of freedom is actively grasping and seizing, that is, the concept of "synthesis." Of course, freedom itself still refers to negation or self-negation, but the positivity of self-negation is synthesis, or synthesis is the embodiment of freedom. Freedom is not being determined by nothing but determining oneself by oneself. Not being determined by anything is Zhuangzi's "freedom," which is being determined by everything but yourself. Such "freedom" is only "natural" or yielding inaction. Conversely, only one's own decision and determination is true freedom, and this kind of freedom is grounded in the principles decided by oneself as one's inner necessity. It considers all external necessity as the means of realizing this internal necessity. It therefore must synthesize, act and sublate the external hardness of necessity while incorporating it into its own system of ends; it must reveal external things as being essentially the alienation of itself so it can logically retrieve this alienated being.

The same applies to all oppositions that are assumed as fixed, as for example the finite and the infinite, the singular and the universal. These are not in contradiction through some external conjoining; on the

contrary, as an examination of their nature shows, they are a transition in and for themselves; the synthesis and the subject in which they appear is the product of their concept's own reflection. [...] it is the concept that, on the contrary, will fix its sight on them, move them as their soul and bring out their dialectic.⁸⁶

Synthesis and subject are the products of the concept's self-reflection, because the self-reflection of the concept as absolute reflection is itself the transcendence of all oppositions and limits. This transcendence is actively grasping and synthesizing at the level of speculation; it manifests as the subject.

Hegel points out that discovering this synthetic principle of subjectivity through the essence of the concept was the great contribution from Kant.

Kant went beyond this external relation of the understanding, as the faculty of concepts and of the concept, to the "I". It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Reason* that the unity which constitutes the essence of the concept is recognized as the original synthetic unity of apperception, the unity of the "I think," or of self-consciousness [...].⁸⁷ His original synthesis of apperception is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the beginning of a true apprehension of the nature of the concept.⁸⁸

But Hegel also points out that Kant does not thoroughly implement his fundamental principle, but instead regards this synthesis as merely a subjective (and even psychological) principle, as a hollow form devoid of content; it depends on the presence of an alien being. That is, the thing-in-itself provides it with perceptual data for synthesis, but it is itself incompatible with the thing-in-itself and standing in external opposition with it. In this way, synthesis is always merely external. When it processes and connects together the sensibility's mutually separate representations, these sensuous representations are not regarded as the products of sensibility, as if they were just squeezed into a frame or container. "The term itself, 'synthesis,' easily conjures up again the picture of an external unity, of a mere combination of terms that are intrinsically separate."⁸⁹ When the synthesis truly encounters the objective thing-in-itself, when it is forced to go beyond its own external reflection and attain reason, it falls helpless in the face of the resulting dialectical contradiction and retreats back into the field of representations whose total synthesis remains totally incomplete. "The result being that the synthesis is again lost, lost also to the infinite unity of reason, and lost with it is whatever beginning there was of a speculative."⁹⁰ In other words, in Kant, although the essence of thought and concepts is attributed to synthesis, this synthesis does not constitute truth but only grasps appearance; it does not really synthesize and digest its content but just stays on the surface of content. Such synthesizing is actually just a separating. When it separates the "thing-in-itself" from the scope of its synthesis, it also separates the content of the sensuous material from the

thing-in-itself and from the synthesis itself. It can link together these contents externally, but it cannot appropriate them as its own.

Nevertheless, Hegel still derives his doctrine of the nature of dialectical synthesis of things and concepts from Kant's principle of synthesis. "Because this determinateness is the determinateness of the concept, and hence the absolute determinateness, singularity, the concept is the ground and the source of all finite determinateness and manifoldness."⁹¹ In Hegel's view, Kant regards the active role of conceptual synthesis as that of pure, universal self-consciousness, which is completely correct.

The concept, when it has progressed to a concrete existence which is itself free, is none other than the "I" or pure self-consciousness. True, I have concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the "I" is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into determinate existence.⁹²

Kant goes beyond the viewpoint that considers the synthetic role of self-consciousness to be the capacity or property of some kind of substance (soul), but he still fails to reach the viewpoint that views this synthetic role itself as substance, as the pure concept; he fails to realize the singularity and self-negating activity of it as the concrete concept.

But the "I" is in the first place purely self-referring unity, and as such it is universality. In second place, the "I" is just as immediately self-referring negativity, singularity, "absolute determinateness that stands opposed to anything other and excludes it—individual personality."⁹³

This unity of universal and singular is self-consciousness or the nature of the concept; it is also the nature of "synthesis." As the subject and personality, if synthesis is not universal, it can only be a simple "repulsion" of its other but does not have the inclusiveness to contain its other; it will consequently become nothing but subjective, the finite individual of sensibility or representation. Conversely, as universal inclusiveness, synthesis would remain nothing but abstract and empty possibility without the activity of the singular subject (that is, what Kant meant by "thought without content is empty"), but Kant cannot realize his universal principle by way of negating its other and synthesizing its other.

Hegel points out that the concept has this (the universal and the singular) duality in itself, which at first glance seems to be an opposition that is irreconcilable, but this opposition is only a superficial reflection, which is caused by the nature of the concept in reflection: "For this determinateness, as it is in the concept, is the total reflection—a doubly reflective shine, both outwards, as reflection into the other, and inwards, as reflection into itself."⁹⁴ The intermediary between the opposing parties is particularity. First of all, the universality of the concept as universality is already particular, because universality is immediately seen as such a (universal) quality of things, which is different

from all other particular qualities; it is preserved by abstracting from or throwing away all other particular properties. In this way, universality is also a particularity itself, but this particularity is different from the vanishing of all other changes; it is a quality that can remain unchanging throughout change. However, this remaining unchanging is only relative: "the universal accordingly takes on a particularity which is resolved in a higher universality."⁹⁵ It is just a concrete "genus." A genus is universal for lower things but particular for a higher genus. But when it "folds back from externality to itself," it is no longer compared to other things but considers itself as a concept. You can see that any concept is both particular and universal, or conceptual universality posits itself as particularity.

To this extent, the universal is also the substance of its determinations, but in such a way that what for the substance as such was an accident, is the concept's own self mediation, its own immanent reflection. But this mediation, which first raises the accidental to necessity, is the manifested reference; the concept is not the abyss of formless substance, or the necessity which is the inner identity of things or circumstances different from each other and reciprocally constricting; rather, as absolute negativity, it is the informing and creative principle.⁹⁶

Universality is thus understood: "as a second universal, as the negation of negation, it is absolute determinateness, that is, singularity and concreteness." The singular concept is the concrete concept, which by sublating particularity contains particularity in itself and returns back to the universality of the concept. At this point, it is "the power of freedom" and "is life, self, spirit, absolute concept." On the one hand, it reveals particularity is always posited by universality itself, which becomes singularity by synthesizing particularity with its other into universality; on the other hand, because of this revelation, the concept gains the confidence to no longer fear plunging into a particular relationship with its other, because it believes this particular relationship will eventually revert back to its own principle of universality. In this way, it actively and freely dissolves itself into each of its moments, thus positing the "loss" of the concept itself and the advance into judgment.

This is the true meaning of Hegel's statement "Singularity is not, however, only the turning back of the concept into itself, but the immediate loss of it. Through singularity, where it is internal to itself, the concept becomes external to itself and steps into actuality."⁹⁷ The activity of the concept is manifested in singularity, without which the concept cannot gather its own inner power and cannot actualize its own latent power of freedom in the outside world. "Singularity appears as the reflection of the concept out of its determinateness into itself."⁹⁸ It expresses the highest active synthesis of the concept itself, because of which alone it can fashion forms and engage in creation and "enter actuality" with an active disposition. Here we can mention in passing that in his doctoral thesis, Marx brilliantly applied this principle

to philosophy's relationship to actuality, through which the following revolutionary conclusion came into being:

Their liberation of the world from un-philosophy is at the same time their own liberation from the philosophy that held them in fetters as a particular system," [...] "[w]hen philosophy turns itself as will against the world of appearance, then the system is lowered to an abstract totality, inspired by the urge to realise itself, it enters into tension against the other. The inner self-contentment and completeness has been broken. What was inner light has become consuming flame turning outwards. The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realisation is also its loss."⁹⁹

Therefore, in Hegel, the singular and concrete concept becomes the true beginning and ground of judgment by virtue of it being the synthetic unity of apperception: "therefore, it is by starting from the unity of the concept as ground that the judgment is considered in accordance with its true objectivity. In this respect, judgment is the originaive division (or *Teilung*, in German) of an originaive unity."¹⁰⁰ By "originaive division" Hegel is referring here to the self-differentiation of the original synthetic unity. The power of this self-differentiation consists in this synthetic unity, because this synthetic unity as the singular is an independent, self-sufficient and free subject, but it also happens to be a subject that is flawed and off-balance. Because the subject is facing its own other at this time, that is, another singular, it proposes the task of further synthesizing and negating the "otherness" of another singularity. What is carried out between these two syntheses is the self-differentiation, the judgment or originaive division of the concept, that is, analysis. Through this self-differentiation or analysis, the concept determines its own objective reality.

To this extent the method of absolute cognition is analytic. That the method finds the further determinations of its initial universal simply and solely in this universal, constitutes the concept's absolute objectivity, of which the method is the certainty [...].¹⁰¹ This reflection is the first stage of the forward movement—the emergence of non-indifference, judgment, and determining in general.¹⁰²

However, this differentiation does not externally divide the concrete "but takes the determinate from its subject matter, for it is itself its immanent principle and its soul."¹⁰³ So such analysis is also a process that is synthetic: "Equally so, however, is the method synthetic, for its subject matter, while immediately determined as the simple universal, through the determinateness which it has in its very immediacy and universality, proves to be an other."¹⁰⁴ The reason why the object can reveal its other as the other of itself, the reason why it can carry out the differentiation of itself or analysis of itself in the

synthesis, is because it is originally a particular concept. It is the singularity that synthesizes universality within itself; it both contains in itself that universality of an other and is the originative impulse and free power to differentiate itself (analyze itself) into an other. That is to say, it is in its own other that it reflects the free subjectivity of itself. Therefore, it is exactly the same process of differentiating an other from itself while reflecting and turning back to itself from an other that should be called the dialectical moment.

In this way, Hegel distinguishes dialectical synthesis from the external synthesis (combination) of the understanding. The latter stands next to analysis as two completely separate and opposed processes; the former process is the union and identity of analysis and synthesis or, we could also say, it is the process of synthesizing analysis and synthesis. I think that by making this point we can explain why Hegel does not show any preference when formally discussing the relationship between analysis and synthesis, but gives the impression that synthesis is worthier, insofar as synthesis finds more mention in him. In fact, this is a fundamental characteristic of Hegel's philosophy because all of this is for the sake of nothing more than to achieve synthesis. "From this it is clear that the principle of identity itself, and still more the principle of contradiction, are not of merely analytical but of synthetic nature."¹⁰⁵ As early as in the *Fragments of a System* by Hegel in 1800, Hegel had already proposed this formula: life is the union of unity and disunity. In the following year, in *The Difference between Fichte and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Hegel further presented the formula of the unity of identity and non-identity.¹⁰⁶ This is what he later underscores in *The Science of Logic*: "that the truth is complete only in the unity of identity and difference and, consequently, that it only consists in this unity."¹⁰⁷ It derives from the same source. In his view, this higher level of synthesis and unification is precisely because it is the synthesis of analysis and synthesis, the unity of identity and difference, so it is distinguished from the external combination or the unification of the understanding. This is the most important difference between Hegel's philosophy of the unity of opposites and Schelling's philosophy of "indistinguishable identity." This difference thus reflects the unique essence of Hegel's philosophy, that is, the substance of the "synthetic philosophy" that is both the activity of the totality and the totality of activity.

This insistence on synthesis is mainly for the sake of expressing the "concrete concept." As Hegel argues: "Expressed as a proposition, the concrete would be first of all a synthetic proposition."¹⁰⁸ It is generally believed that Hegel's "concrete concept" refers to a unified concept that includes diversity and differs from itself, that is, the unity of different determinations. That is all well and good, for many expressions in this regard can also be found in Hegel. But when people describe Hegel's concrete concept in this way, a very subtle difference is ignored, which is that in the expression "unity of different determinations," only the two moments of difference (different determinations) and identity (unification) are expressed, but "the unity of identity and difference" is not expressible in this way. In other words, only the particular and universal

moments are expressed, but the singular moment is not. Therefore, strictly speaking, this expression is still imperfect, for it easily slides into the one-sided unity of the understanding, binding different determinations externally while sacrificing the subjective activity of the totality. The particular concept is not only the unity of diversity but also the self-negating unity of freedom, for which reason, in addition to synthesizing the internal and gathering the internal forces of itself, it also must synthesize the external; it must also transform the “inner light” into a flame burning outward, but it must treat its other as the analytic being of itself and also synthesize the other into the universality of itself. This “unity of identity and difference” is, in principle, what constitutes the third moment of each stage of development of Hegel’s *Logic*:

though these forms of judgments, that the third is immediacy and mediation, or that it is the unity of the two, are not capable of grasping it, for it is not a dormant third but, exactly like this unity, self-mediating movement and activity. —Just as that with which we began was the universal, so the result is the singular, the concrete, the subject.¹⁰⁹

Of course, we would be wrong to interpret this in the following way: the first two moments have no subjective activity in Hegel; only the third moment is active. On the contrary, the third moment should be understood as that which is inherently contained (as potential) in the first moment (immediate simple universality) but is only developed and unfolded out of the second moment. Therefore, each of these three moments is a totality, but only the third moment, singularity (the individual), is the proposing or positing of this totality: “While each moment of the concept is itself the entire concept, individuality, the subject, is the concept posited as the totality.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, the third moment has a particularly important position in Hegel as the dialectic synthesis of the whole process, which arranges all parts of the concept into a whole (*gesetzt*). That is, it enables the whole to be determined and posited, imbuing the concept with its own shape or form: the synthetic function of reflection is ultimately what shapes Hegel’s dialectic. This third moment is what Hegel calls reason or speculation.

It should be clear from this that Hegel’s dialectic is active, even from the perspective of form: it first manifests itself as the reversal of commonsense relations between things (subject and predicate, subjective and objective, subject and object). Secondly, it manifests itself in this inner necessity of inversion. Then, it manifests itself in the singularity of this immanently necessary process, that is, free synthesis of the concrete concept. These three levels are all exhibited in the transcendence of acts of reflection, each higher than the other in degree or level. In the “Doctrine of Existence,” the categories alternating into one another only need to point to conversion (or the inversion of the inversion). Inversion, that is, the alteration of opposites into one another, is the main mode upon which the dialectical relationship of these categories depends. In the “Doctrine of Essence,” in addition to inversion,

it also becomes necessary to reveal the necessity of the alteration of each pair of categories and the inseparability of opposites for the dialectical relationship of the categories to become expressible. In the "Doctrine of the Concept," it is not enough to point out that the relation of inversion and the necessary relation are insufficient, for it is also necessary to specifically propose the active and free synthesis. Here Hegel asserts that this synthesis is the ground for the formation of all relations; the evolution of categories does not just proceed from one to another, not just from one pair to another but as a set of three; it is the same category that synthesizes its other and reverts back to itself: the concreteness of the concept is only expressible in this way. This active synthesis is arguably the highest form of the Hegelian dialectic, because, as people have already seen, "the only goal of Hegelian logic is to grasp the 'concrete concept.'"¹¹¹ The particular concept is the "Idea," and the most particular concept is "the Absolute Idea." "Now just as the unfolding of the logical idea proves to be a progression from the abstract to the concrete."¹¹² The initial determinations (such as "being" and "nothing") are the most abstract, but in fact they already potentially contain all of the more particular categories that unfold later on. The *Logic* is the process of gradually developing these categories in line with their growing particularity. The last category is the most specific, but it is nothing more than the total synthesis of all the previous categories; this synthesis is not only done in the final stage, but the whole process is recalling and synthesizing itself from the very beginning but is only clearly stated at the end.

In this sense, synthesis, as the dialectic's highest form of reflection, is the total synthesis of form with its content. Synthesis is self-negation, the negation of negation, the negation of and by itself; it is the essence of the concept and of thinking, the free spirit of self-consciousness and reason; it is "love" or the sacred "blessing of heaven"; it is the great force of liberation.¹¹³ Here, the soul of the dialectic (negation) is the soul with form (synthesis), and the form of the dialectic (reflection) is the form of the soul itself. This point is explicitly posited.

The tensions of speculation, that is, the relationship of identity between the factor of *logos* and that of *nous* in Hegel's dialectic now possesses an explicit outline through the analysis of Part 2 of the previous volume and Part 1 of this volume. However, so far, we have only separately analyzed the content and form of Hegel's dialectic, but have only been reminded of the inseparable relationship between these two aspects throughout this analysis. This is a method of processing that the expression itself requires. That is, to explain two indivisible things, we must first separate them in order to explain them; otherwise, we cannot show the inseparability of the two. Hegel is saying "philosophy merely lays claim to thinking as constituting the proper form of its business."¹¹⁴ After that, Hegel goes on to say:

On the other hand, it is just as important that philosophy comes to understand that its content [*Inhalt*] is none other than the basic content [*Gehalt*]

that has originally been produced and reproduces itself in the sphere of the living spirit, a content turned into a world, namely the outer and inner world of consciousness, or that its content is actuality.¹¹⁵

This separate explanation of form and content does not simply explain the separation of the two aspects but is also the premise of specifying the relationship of identity between the two aspects. However, once this separate explanation is completed, the only thing that remains to be done is to see what kind of result they have produced in their conjoined roles. That is to say, the elaboration of them separately cannot be the final work. When analyzing the dialectic's highest form of reflection, what we argue is that synthesis also appropriately applies to the clarification of the totality of the Hegelian dialectic. In the tensions of speculation, if the factor of *logos* is the universal form and that of *nous* the particular content, then they still have to wait to posit their own system of tensions in one moment of synthetic unity.

This synthetic moment itself expands onto three levels: dialectical logic, which is one with epistemology; dialectical reason, which is one with ontology; dialectical ontology, which is one with logic. This is the Hegelian dialectic's unification of logic, epistemology and ontology, which will be explained in the following volume.

Notes

- 1 In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the "thing in-itself" is also discussed in relation to each of its moments as the relationship of subject to predicate inverting. Here, the thing in-itself, or "the crux of the matter" as the *subject* is but the unspoken inner intention or unrealized "will" that is still only just "meaning" to be realized. See Hegel 2018, 238.
- 2 Hegel 2018, 95.
- 3 Ibid., 97.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., 100.
- 7 Hegel 2010, 441.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., 443.
- 10 Ibid., 444.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 446.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., 447.
- 15 Ibid., 449.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., 487.
- 18 Ibid., 462. See the criticism on page 93, that of the "reversal of position" (i.e., what we usually call "transition of status") often occurring in the natural sciences.

- 19 Hegel 2010, 463.
- 20 Ibid., 463.
- 21 Ibid., 352.
- 22 Ibid., 353.
- 23 Ibid., 347.
- 24 As Gadamer puts it, the inverted world is the inversion of the inversion. See Gadamer 1976, 43.
- 25 Hegel 2010, 552.
- 26 Ibid., 554.
- 27 Hegel 2018, 39.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., 40.
- 30 Ibid., 41.
- 31 Hegel 2010b, 143.
- 32 Hegel 2010, 530.
- 33 Hegel 2010b, 176.
- 34 Ibid., 231.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Hegel 2010b, 56.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid., 84.
- 39 Ibid., 85.
- 40 Ibid., 57.
- 41 Ibid., 61.
- 42 Hegel regards her as the symbol of fate and necessity. See Hegel 2010, 284.
- 43 Peking 1961, 7.
- 44 Peking 1961, 17.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., 20.
- 47 Hegel 2010b, 220.
- 48 Ibid., 220.
- 49 Hegel 2010, 356.
- 50 Ibid., 367.
- 51 Ibid., 384.
- 52 Ibid., 385.
- 53 Ibid., 481; italics in original.
- 54 Hegel 2010b, 220.
- 55 Hegel 2010, 485.
- 56 Ibid., 487.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid., 488.
- 59 Ibid., 488.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid., 504.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid., 509.
- 65 Ibid.

- 66 Ibid., 511.
- 67 Hegel 2010b, 116.
- 68 Hegel 2018, 35.
- 69 Hegel 2010b, 37.
- 70 Ibid., 75.
- 71 Ibid., 129.
- 72 Ibid., 94.
- 73 Ibid., 231.
- 74 Ibid., 219.
- 75 Ibid., 232.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Hegel 2010, 34.
- 78 Hegel 2010b, 39.
- 79 Hegel 2010, 37.
- 80 Hegel 2010b, 158.
- 81 Ibid., 20–1.
- 82 We are, of course, not saying here that dialectical necessity is only a psychological fact. Just as true freedom is outgoing and posits freedom of self in what is other than itself, in Hegel, dialectical necessity is the methodological weapon for understanding and simultaneously transforming the world.
- 83 Hegel 2010b, 60.
- 84 Ibid., 230.
- 85 Ibid., 232.
- 86 Hegel 2010, 744.
- 87 Ibid., 515.
- 88 Ibid., 520.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Ibid., 514.
- 93 Ibid., 514.
- 94 Ibid., 533.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid., 532.
- 97 Ibid., 548.
- 98 Ibid., 546.
- 99 Marx & Engels 2000.
- 100 Hegel 2010, 552.
- 101 Ibid., 741.
- 102 Ibid., 740.
- 103 Ibid., 741.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ibid., 360.
- 106 Hegel 1977, 156.
- 107 Hegel 2010, 358.
- 108 Ibid., 359.
- 109 Ibid., 747.

- 110 Hegel 2010b, 237.
- 111 Zhang 1981, 106.
- 112 Hegel 2010b, 137.
- 113 Ibid., 232.
- 114 Ibid., 32.
- 115 Ibid., 33.

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Index

- actualization: of “implicit”
 potential 93; of law 59; as negation 4;
 of purpose 23–25; of rational
 self-consciousness 53, 57
- affirmation: absolute 18–19; first
 immediate 20; my existence’s
 immediate 127–8; negation itself as
 the subject of 19; as negation of the
 negation 75–6; of the negation of the
 negation 98; a new 23; of quality 73;
 relationship of self-negation and 85;
 as result of double negation 12–14;
 return to the beginning 107; return to
 the first 23
- alienation: of the concept 98–100;
 and freedom 196; of labor 48–9; the
 negative as reason and its 55–66
- animal: cannot say ‘I’ 120; and emotion
 or passion 142; and evolutionary
 theory 28; the human as diseased 29;
 impulse 195–6; life as neither plant
 nor 95; life of pure materiality 22;
 man as a political 140; man as rational
 139; as passive and unconscious 145
- another self-consciousness 44–7
- Aristotle: and contradiction 86; on
 negativity and energy 3–4; and *nous* as
 the thought of thought 110; and the
 potential/actual distinction 93; and
 purpose or end 23; on reason 139–140
- Baruch de Spinoza 1, 9, 13–14, 41–2,
 89–90, 107, 114, 140
- being: accidental and necessary 187–9;
 in Chinese philosophy 5–12; concept
 as truth of essence and 135–6;
 the concept’s mediation and the
 return back to immediate 96–108;
 consciousness and being for-itself
 37–47; Daoism and undetermined
 196; determined-for-itself 75–6; of
 essence and of the shine 123–126;
 for-itself and determination 71–4; in
 the form of potential 23–5; the Idea as
 unity of thinking and 165–6; identical
 essence of self-consciousness and
 55–6; in-and-for-itself and the
 concept’s restoration of 90–5; and
 the negation of nothingness 157–8;
 quality as first category of pure
 71; posited a mere noun 147–9;
 of positedness 133–4; the positive
 as immediate 12–18; as sublated
 immediacy 127–8; transition from
 being to essence 76–83
- Charles Darwin 28
- Charles Tyler 61
- Cheng Mingdao 6–7
- Chinese philosophy 5–12, 109, 113–114
- consciousness: of another 175; becoming
 aware of itself 120–21; Christian
 52–3; double externality of 110;
 ethical 60–1; of freedom 47–50;
 freedom of individual 155; national
 185; *potential being* contained in 41;
 transcending sensuous experience
 by negation 38–9; true nature of the
 object emerges in 181–2; unhappy 52,
 57, 64–5
- contingency 23–4, 89–90, 102, 167,
 187–191
- contradiction 9–11, 39, 46, 59, 64, 69,
 79–90, 93–8, 133, 156–7, 164–7, 174–5,
 187, 190–1
- dao* 4–5, 113
- Democritus 4, 6

- “determinate being” 1, 7, 13, 71, 74, 98, 125, 131–2, 164
 determinateness 8–10, 71–3, 77, 82, 91, 107, 123–31, 133, 148–9, 159, 161, 165, 179, 193, 199–200
 determinate quality 8–10
 “determining reflection” 16–17, 131–6
 Dieter Henrich 1, 12
 difference: as the *becoming-unequal* of what is equal 39; between consciousness and self-consciousness 43; between reference and object and self-reference 40–2; between one quality (measure) and another 78; and consciousness 37; essence and accidental 190–1; and differentiating 34; determinate 146; as determination in Aristotle 4; “the ground of identity and difference” 164; of the identity and 85, 166; identity and the two moments of 201; (identity, difference contradiction) 134–5; incommensurable 26; incommensurability of quantitative and qualitative 73–5; as inner difference or the absolute concept of 175; as intensification 157; in judgment “between subject and predicate within itself” 179; mediation as the universal 38; as opposition and contradiction 86; passing over into contradiction 165–6; and the return to self-relation 97–8; the universal 38–9
 differentiation: of identity 84; of names and substances, and of wording and meaning in Chinese philosophy 113–4; of the original synthetic unity by itself 200; of self and object as self-consciousness 38–40; of self and other by consciousness 41
 Duns Scotus 30–1
 Edmund Husserl 28, 41–2
 essential reflection 15
 external reflection 16, 18, 26, 78, 82–5, 128–30, 132–4, 141
 freedom: active and positive 45; the negative as 45–55; of self-consciousness 47–52; as synonymous with the negative 45
 Friedrich Engels 28, 69, 74–5, 81–2
 Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi 18–19
 Helmuth Plessner 28–9
 Heraclitus: and the identity of being and nothing 4; and the spiral figure 100; and becoming on the basis of *logos* 109
 Immanuel Kant 16, 18, 27–28, 43, 71–2, 92, 96, 111–12, 115, 119, 126, 128–34, 140, 142, 146, 149, 154, 174, 181–91, 197–8
 individuality 47, 58–9, 162–6, 202
 Jacob Böhme 4
 Jean-Paul Sartre 10–11
 Karl Marx 20–1, 35–7, 58–66, 69, 79, 81, 88, 99, 101, 114, 144–5, 199–200
 Laozi 5–8, 11
 leap 25–6, 71–8
logos: and the cycle in ancient Greek philosophy 184–5; as eternal 10; 27; as the factor of universal form 203–04; *nous* advances into the universal 96; of reason 55–6; and the reflective connection of language to world in the West and China 109–114, 109n2; and universality 139–141
 mastery and servitude 44, 47–50, 58, 175
 Mozi 7–8
 negation: analyzing the internal implications of 17–18; the double 12–22; as doubt 15–16; extrinsic 12–13; distinction between formal and absolute 19; of itself by itself 15; as the “middle term” of deduction 25; as presupposing affirmation 3–4; and purposiveness 22–31; and subjectivity 34–5; as self-negation *see* self-negation; self-referential *see* self-negation; as something’s reference to itself 1–2; and sublation *see* sublation; turns into absolute 18; the understanding’s style of 16; as voiding 5–8
 negative: actualized end as negation of the 24–5; Adorno’s degrading of the 102; becomes positive 176; category of this category 174; of the concept 141; the essence as being’s 82–5; explorations of the 3; as freedom 45–55; the force of the 124; as innermost

- source of the dialectical 101; of itself 127, 146, 194; lingering with the 22; “negative judgment” 2; and the negatively rational 149–158; the negative’s relation to itself 72; “the negative totality” 77; not as simple lack of the pre-existing determinate being 13–14; as “nothing” 3–4; the opposition of positive and 112; its other or its 80; as self-consciousness 35–45; self-referring 88–90, 95; postures 24–5; as reason and its alienation 55–66; reflection as in its other 175; reference to itself 128–9; relationship between shine and the 125; unity with itself 14–15; of what is first 23
- negativity: as active efficacy 4; absolute 9, 20, 124–6, 163, 176, 190, 199; of all appearances 156; the concept’s self- 177; the concept’s self-referring 90–2; difference is the 84; external 13; in general 161; implications of activity and positivity in 45–6; the “I” as immediately self-referring 198; “infinite” as concept of 78; inner restlessness as torment and self- 195; inside of things and contradiction 81–3, 87; the internal impulse of 56; mediation or 57; of its own self 23; qualitative change as becoming of 71; and pain 95; pure 24, 121–2; as self-negativity inside negation 14–15; self-referring 88–90; as not simply “excluding or repelling” 13–14; that is inside of the concept 144–5
- Norman Levine 9
- nothing: abstract and concrete concepts of 7–9; according to the history of Chinese philosophy 5–11; being empty and doing 49; Buddhism’s purest and most abstract 10; determinate and contentful 12–13; its difference from 144; empty being and empty 180; false appearances as 190; the movement from and back to 16–17, 82, 134–6, 158; as negative antithesis 157; as the negative *see* negative; as not simply lack of “being” 4; *positing* reflection from 131; as “pure nothing” 120; reason thinks 193 as an ultimate 107; the unity of being and 148, 162; which is said in identity discourse 84
- otherness 1, 23, 39, 73, 95, 122, 133–34, 164, 175–190, 196, 200
- Pei Wei 6–7
- positing reflection 15, 131–141
- positively rational 158–170
- predicate 37, 43, 92, 100, 167–69, 174, 178–79, 181, 202
- purposiveness: of freedom 94–5; negation and 22–31; or “potentiality” 77; speculation as 160
- Qual* 4–5
- Quantitative change 25–6, 71, 74–5
- religion 35, 43, 52–4, 143, 194
- self-negation: and alienation 57–64; and Christianity 53–5; the circular progression of 180; of the concept by itself 155–56; as dialectic of the negative 101–102; Hegel’s principle of 17; or “internal negativity” 87; of the living being 96; as movement itself 24; the necessity of 186; as negation referring to itself 11–14; not the passive sort 25–6; positive aspect of [Hegel’s] principle of 169; of the positive by itself 14–16; Proudhon’s misunderstanding of 21; reflection as the expression of 107–08, 121, 123–26; and self-sublation 133; and self-affirmation 85–6; and self-consciousness 36–7; self-differentiation and 83–84; as source of activity 78–80; as synthesis 196–203; three concepts of 15–16
- self-positing: of the Ego and non-Ego 18–19; negation as a process of 16; reflection 156; unity of immediacy and mediation 191
- Sengzhao of Jin 7–8
- shine (schein) 15–16, 89, 91, 124–8, 132–4, 160–1, 190–1
- skepticism 7, 16–18, 22–3, 51–2, 59, 111, 125–6, 132, 149–50, 155, 159
- sublation: the Chinese term for 20–22; the German counterpart 21–22; as negation 22
- substance: absolute 89; Cartesian positing of mental and material 132; as *causa sui* 90–1; the Chinese

- debate over 8–11; Chinese debate over name and 113; Chinese doctrine of recovering the unmodified 114; the concept alone is 144; as consciousness itself 50; as essentially negative self-differentiation 34–7; the ethical 60–4; infinite underlying 73; the internal contradiction of absolute 191; of the logical Idea 182; mental 115; as self-differentiating subject 78; as subject 121; subject becomes conscious of itself as 65; that has been let go freely into the concept 161; tur life into fluid 44
- supersensible world 38–9, 44, 72, 119, 153, 174–6
- thing in-itself 16, 37, 174, 174n1, 182, 187–9, 191, 197–8
- Vladimir Lenin 35, 79–80, 99, 163
- void 4, 23, 156
- voiding 5–8
- Wang Anshi 87
- Wang Bi 5–6
- Wang Fuzhi 6–8
- Wang Shuren 17, 44–5
- Werner Heisenberg 13
- wu* 无 5–7
- Xiao Kundao 70, 81–3
- Xue Hua 50–1
- Zaid Orudzhev 70
- Zhang Shiyang 63
- Zhang Zai 6–7
- Zhuangzi 5–8, 11, 49, 196
- Zhu Dianji 86–7